Midland Evangelical Free Church Associate Pastor of Discipleship
Questionnaire Answers from Jonah Stalsberg

PERSONAL:

1. **Please share your personal testimony, call to ministry and the practices you use to keep spiritually healthy and growing.**

   I was raised in a Christian home by loving, faithful parents. My parents brought me up in the ways of the Lord and required me to be in church several times per week. However, up until my 8th grade year, I had not placed my faith in Jesus. That fall, I was invited to attend a new church with a friend from school. I accepted the invitation and went to the youth group the next week. Although I had heard the gospel preached many times before, I had never fully placed my faith in Jesus. One Wednesday, soon after being invited, I placed my faith in the good news of the gospel and was saved. It was not long after that that I began to feel a call to ministry. I began serving in my local church and seeking out serving opportunities and education. I eventually graduated from the University of Northwestern Saint Paul before serving as a youth pastor, which I have been doing for the last several years. My desire to see others changed by the power of the gospel has only grown since being saved, and I hope to further that call at Midland Evangelical Free Church.

   [Jenna's Testimony] I grew up in a small town in Ohio with my parents and seven siblings. My parents raised us to love the Lord, and our family stayed as involved in church as we could. I loved growing up in a Christian home, but when I was 11, the Lord truly got hold of my heart. My life changed, and I began to see both myself and the people around me differently. I finally took my faith and relationship with the Lord seriously. I have been serving the Lord ever since. From a young age, I also felt called to a life of ministry, which led me to Bible college. There, the Lord revealed more of His character to me and transformed my understanding of His sovereignty. He has blessed me with a husband and son, and we feel privileged to raise our son to know the Lord. My desire is to keep serving the church body and further the ministry by being the hands and feet of Jesus both at church and at home.

2. **Please provide the names of individuals and/or the resources that have shaped and/or influence your spiritual life and ministry.**

   My wife, Jenna, has felt called to be a mom and a pastor's wife her entire life. She has supported my ministry by being involved with Youth and Young Adults and by fulfilling several administrative roles on the church staff.

   Pastor Anthony Cox is the City Campus Pastor at River Valley Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He served as my youth pastor, internship director, and officiant at my wedding. He has been a faithful mentor throughout my ministry journey, from the moment I felt called to ministry through my entry into full-time ministry.

Pastor Justin Hansen is my current Lead Pastor at New Heights Church. During my time at New Heights, he has encouraged me to pursue my passions for expository preaching and discipleship in the church. He has been instrumental in helping me recognize the gifts God has given me and employ them in the church.

As for resources, I have been most helped by resources that have aided me in greater study of God's word. I am a proficient Logos Bible Software user, having spent several thousand dollars on the program, and not a penny has been wasted. Logos, along with my associated commentaries, lexicons, systematic theology books, and pastoral theology resources, has aided my ministry more than any other resource.

3. **How do you address weaknesses in your life and ministry?**

   My most significant weakness is that I am an overthinker. I have a very analytical mind, which can be a strength, but if not managed, could lead to sinful anxiousness. I believe that the type of anxiety that is rooted in a lack of trust in God is sin.**

   To this end, first and foremost, I believe that when the Bible speaks on a topic, it provides the ultimate truth. For that reason, prayer is the most essential component of my fight against this tendency. I also have pastoral mentors who speak into my life and recognize when I may be acting from anxiousness rather than faith. Finally, my wife is a great resource and has increased my faith through biblical wisdom and encouragement. Although I have not conquered this sinful tendency, I do recognize my propensity for it, and with the Lord's help I have grown significantly in this area.

   ** I recommend The Gospel Coalition's article on this topic for a fuller treatment of the topic. I am not suggesting that all types of anxiety are sin, and Joe Carter is helpful in breaking this down. https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/ask-tgc-anxiety-sin/

4. **How do you ensure personal accountability?**

   To me, the most important aspect of personal accountability is practicing the Spiritual disciplines. Being in communion with God every day and allowing the Holy Spirit to convict you is the best way to ensure accountability. At the same time, part of the local church's responsibility is to stir each other to good works. For that reason, I regularly meet with our executive pastor who serves as my boss and mentor. I also seek out mentorship from other Godly men in ministry who keep me accountable and point me to Christ.

5. **What do you do to protect or preserve your mental and emotional health, and how do you deal with stressful situations?**

   Again, I think the most important answer is spiritual disciplines. Spending time with the Lord every morning is the most important aspect of maintaining mental and emotional health. Beyond that, I have a consistent workout routine, and I am an avid reader.

   I pride myself on being calm under pressure. I believe that the Lord has gifted me to handle stressful conflict situations with grace. At the end of the day, I simply am trying

to be faithful to God, and I trust Him with outcomes. This realization, more than anything else, has helped me in any challenging ministry situation.

6. **What do you do to protect or preserve your physical health?**

   I am very active physically, and I consider physical health important to the life of a Christian. I maintain a disciplined workout routine – even while working full time and being in seminary – working out a minimum of three times per week. I have also counted my calories and protein intake every day for the last six years. Lastly, during the summers, I enjoy playing on a church softball team to satisfy my competitive edge!

7. **How would you describe the physical, mental, and spiritual health of your immediate family? Please describe any familial concerns that may impact your ministry.**

   In one sense, we are a very healthy family! We are conscious about eating habits and seek to treat our bodies as a temple. My wife has managed an autoimmune condition for most of her life. My son was in the neonatal intensive care unit for a month after he was born, and although he is healthy now, there have been developmental delays. But considering the factors under our control, we are a healthy family.

   Mentally and spiritually, we are in a great place. I am confident that both my wife and I would attest that we are in the best spiritual season of our lives. The Lord has been good to us, and by His grace, we love Jesus and the gospel more every day. There is nothing that brings us more joy than reveling in God's word and sharing it with others.

8. **Why do you want this job and why are you ready to move on from your present one?**

   I have begun searching for my next place of ministry for two primary reasons. First, my theological convictions have developed to the point that they no longer align with those of the denomination in which I was raised. Second, I believe the Lord has been leading me to pursue a ministry role with a stronger emphasis on discipleship within the local church.

   Having grown up in the Assemblies of God, the tenets of its theology were all that I was familiar with. As I entered ministry, I began to study many of its theological foundations and found that I was no longer in agreement. Additionally, I am seeking a greater discipleship role because I believe it is more closely aligned with my passions and giftings.

   At the end of May, I resigned from my position as the full-time Youth Pastor but have remained part-time as the Young Adults Pastor, allowing me to focus on my M.Div. while we await our next ministry assignment. During this transitional period, I am balancing a forty-hour corporate job, a full-time M.Div. program, serving part-time as a Young Adults Pastor, and leading my family. Although this season is not easy, I am thankful for God's grace in giving me the energy to work hard in all these important pursuits.

Despite my theological differences with the Assemblies of God, I maintain a great relationship with the entire pastoral staff at New Heights Church. They are aware of our search, and although they are sad, they are supportive of us pursuing God's will.

9. **What legacy or impact do you hope to leave in the ministries where you are currently serving?**

   If I could be remembered by one thing, I want to be remembered as faithful. If I was simply remembered as someone who deeply wanted to know God's word and obey what it said, that is success.

   One example is illustrative. During my last sermon as the youth pastor, I closed my sermon by sharing my foremost prayer for New Heights Youth Students over the course of my ministry. I prayed that they would simply learn to love the Bible more. If my legacy of ministry is someone who loved God, loved His word, and helped others – regardless of how many – to do the same, I am happy.

10. **What hardship(s) do you anticipate if you are offered and accept this position?**

    There are always hardships when accepting a new pastoral position. Building relationships, and especially trust, is not easy. Following a leader with a different style or personality from your own can also be challenging. And you never know how those specific challenges may materialize until you arrive.

    In this specific position, I see two primary areas that may provide difficulties. First, I come from a denomination outside of the EFCA. Although I have done my homework and feel confident this would be both a pastoral and a theological fit, I understand others may not be as convinced. However, I can assure you, as someone who grew up in a denomination and eventually realized I was not a theological match, I have determined not to make that mistake again.

    Secondly, my background is primarily in youth ministry. I certainly have experience in the discipleship realm, and that is indicated on my resume. I have proficiency in small groups, discipleship curriculum, volunteer recruitment, and other relevant tasks. I feel very confident in my ability to fulfill the requirements. Yet there is always a learning curve when stepping into a new position. As a fast learner and someone deeply passionate about discipleship, I have no concerns about my ability to fulfill this role.

THEOLOGICAL:

1. **How would you briefly summarize your theological view?**

   I have often said that if forced to sum up my theology in one sentence, I would say "For God's glory and our good." By this I mean that we live for God's glory, and everything that glorifies God is for our good. To expand slightly further, here are what I consider to be my theological absolutes.

Clear Gospel: Preaching the clear gospel is the ultimate responsibility of the church. Churches must clearly define the gospel and reinforce it through their church practices, including preaching, small groups, classes, membership, and ministries.

Biblical Preaching: The primary calling of a pastor is to preach the Word. I believe that the regular diet of a church's preaching should be expository, verse-by-verse through books of the Bible.

Disciple Making: Churches exist to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry." That ministry is primarily to make disciples according to the Great Commission, "teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you."

Complementarian Vision: My wife and I are committed to a complementarian vision of the church and the family. Men and women are equal in status before God but different in role.

2. **How do you define discipleship?**

   To be concise, I will offer this one-sentence description. Discipleship is helping others love Jesus, learn his teachings, follow them, and as a result, become more like Jesus themselves.

3. **How would you support and lead our church's local and global ministries and missions?**

   First, I think it is important to state that both local and global missions are a necessary part of being a biblical church. Empowering others both locally and globally in that effort is an important ministry. I spent some time on the church's website reading more about the culture of missions at Midland, and two things stood out. First, I absolutely love the Go Global core values. The purpose of missions is the glory of God and establishing that biblical foundation is crucial. I also love the emphasis on reaching the unreached, including those in the 10-40 window. I have carried that same passion for many years. Secondly, I love that Midland offered a missions course to "reveal God's heart for the nations." What a great way to establish the biblical priority of missions!

   Similarly, I was encouraged by the Go Local Missions! This is very much in line with my experiences at New Heights. The website mentions service projects, outreach, community, fellowship, and more. All of which we regularly practice in my current context. Altogether, I entirely align with the emphasis on building a missions culture from biblical foundations, and then carrying it out both locally and globally. I would be honored to continue that effort.

4. **How do you personally engage in evangelism, and how do you explain the gospel specifically?**

   I personally engage in evangelism primarily through our Young Adults ministry at New Heights Church. Recently we have had several new members join our Young Adults ministry, including non-believers. I have had the privilege of sharing the gospel with

them on many occasions, and God is working in their life. I also engage in evangelism at work – while I have been working in a corporate role – and through other relationships I have built with non-believers.

The gospel is the message containing the good news of Jesus Christ. The only place that we can look to for a perfect presentation of the gospel is in the Scriptures. Although the gospel can be preached from many passages in the Bible, a systematic theology of the elements of the gospel helps provide a definition. My attempt at doing so is as follows. The Gospel is the belief that Jesus died for our sins according to the scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3). He was raised by God on the third day (vs 4) he reigns at the right hand of the Father (Ephesians 1:20), and all who place their faith in the atoning work of Christ on their behalf are saved (Romans 10:9, Ephesians 2:8-9). Salvation can only be received by recognizing your inability to save yourself and instead recognizing God's work to save you regardless of anything you have done or ever will do (Romans 5:1-2, Eph. 1:5). To put it succinctly, salvation is found only by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

5. **What theological issues are most relevant in today's environment, and what are your stances regarding those topics?**

   The most important theological issue is always maintaining a clear gospel. The gospel is always under attack both from inside and outside the Church. There is nothing more important than defining the gospel, keeping it clear, and preaching it.

   Secondly, the doctrine of biblical authority remains under attack, again both inside and outside the church. I am firmly committed to the inerrancy and infallibility of God's word. It is the ultimate authority in the life and practice of a Christian.

   Finally, to wade into a topic that has become more culturally sensitive, the complementarian vs egalitarian debate has become increasingly relevant over the last few years. Although I certainly affirm women using their gifts in many ministry areas inside the church, I land on the complementarian side and believe that the role and function of a pastor is reserved for men.

MINISTRY:

1. **What is your philosophy of ministry?**

   In 1 Corinthians 4:2, Paul declares, "Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2 ESV). If asked to sum up my ministry philosophy in one sentence, I would say, "Faithfulness Equals Success". The primary responsibility of the pastor is to preach the word faithfully. This does not mean that He is without other responsibilities, as shepherding includes far more than just preaching, but his primary responsibility is preaching the word. Ministry staff support the ministry of the word. Every practice of the church aligns with the word. If we do that, we are successful, and we pray that God will bless our imperfect efforts in His service, for the good of those He has called us to love and serve.

2. **Which element of ministry stirs your heart and passion most?**

   I have desired the office of a pastor since I was in the 8th grade. There was nothing else that I considered devoting my life to, and I know that God has called me to serve Him in vocational ministry. Although there are many things that I could point to as passions in ministry, my greatest joy is teaching God's word. I feel that God created me and gifted me to proclaim His word to His people. This includes more than just preaching and teaching but extends to one-on-one discipleship and counseling. I have no greater joy or purpose than loving God's people and ministering to them.

3. **Describe who you are discipling now and specifics of how that occurs. How have you seen people who you discipled developing other followers of Christ?**

   As a pastor on staff at New Heights Church, I have the privilege of discipling many different believers in different stages of faith. My wife and I are discipling a couple that was just recently saved – within the last several months – and they are now preparing for marriage. They attend Young Adults; I will be performing their wedding, and we both are doing their premarital counseling. Secondly, I am discipling another young man in our young adults ministry who became a Christian several years ago and is now pursuing pastoral ministry. He recently got engaged; I will be serving as his best man, along with being a ministry mentor. Lastly, I am still discipling several former youth students.

   The second example listed above has been an encouraging story of multiplication. I began building a relationship with this young man when I became the Young Adults Pastor nearly two years ago. Since then, he has grown in his faith, gotten engaged to a wonderful Christian woman, and is now pursuing ministry. He has stepped into various leadership roles, allowing him the opportunity to use his gifts to disciple others.

4. **This position has 5 key responsibilities. Please share your brief perspective on each aspect and provide examples of your experience in each area.**

   Discipleship Pathway Development

   Making Disciples for Jesus Christ is the ultimate calling for every Christian. Regardless of position in the Church, pastors are to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, or in other words, disciple them.

   Specific experience or examples in this area: As a Youth and Young Adults pastor, we created discipleship pathways for both ministries. I have also served on the leadership team for the New Heights School of Spiritual Formation and had the privilege of incorporating that into our discipleship pathway at New Heights.

   Adult Discipleship & Education

   One of the key elements of discipleship is teaching others the teachings of Jesus. "Teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you" is an educational call.

Specific experience or examples in this area: The New Heights School of Spiritual Formation is a seminary-level discipleship course at New Heights Church. I have served on the leadership team since the inception and have the privilege of creating and teaching some material in the course. Likewise, my role as a young adults pastor has also allowed me to disciple other young adults in various capacities, primarily through bible study and small groups.

Care Teams & Congregational Care

As pastors, we are called to love the people we serve, and there is arguably no better way to accomplish this than pastoral care.

Specific experience or examples in this area: As a pastor serving in the local church, you have the joy of loving and serving the members of the congregation. Pastoring people in their hardest moments is both humbling and challenging. During my ministry, I had the privilege of countless congregational care opportunities. From hospital visits to crises with families and tragic losses, I have experienced the need for healthy congregational care in the Church.

Missions & Outreach

Missions is another core example of living out Jesus' command to make disciples. Empowering others both locally and globally in that effort is an important ministry.

Specific experience or examples in this area: New Heights Church has built a strong reputation on missions work both locally and globally. We were one of the biggest missions-giving churches in the state of Ohio for the last several years. We also put on numerous outreach events – probably close to one per month – through our various outreach ministries. I have served in leadership capacities, planning, organizing, and running many of those events.

Pastoral Team & Leadership

This aspect is inherent in the others; succeeding in the other four areas requires incorporating pastoral leadership. Ministry is not always easily defined by job descriptions, and part of being a pastor is embodying that role in everything that you do.

Specific experience or examples in this area: With five years of pastoral ministry experience, I am comfortable adapting to different roles and expectations in ministry. I have served in every area listed on the job description under this category, except for worship. And believe me, you don't want me to serve in that capacity! As someone who loves being a pastor, I understand what that entails, and I would be thankful for the opportunity to serve in that capacity at Midland Evangelical Free Church.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT:

1. **What is your leadership and/or management style and can you give examples?**

I tend towards a collaborative leadership style that encourages self-motivation and initiative. Simply, I want teams that I lead to take the initiative and run with ideas that they have. I am more likely to say yes than no, and I will trust my conflict resolution skills if I must intervene. That is not to say that I am conflict-avoidant. It is simply to say that I encourage individuals to be proactive. Reflecting on my own ministry experience, I have found that strong leadership and an emphasis on unity are two key components to encouraging effective teamwork. A strong leader is the most important element of a successful team because it requires a strong leader to relationally invest, delegate, and empower. Insecure Leaders who are afraid of delegating authority will kill collaboration and teamwork. Strong leaders must prefer the team's success even over their own.

2. **How do you plan to handle the administrative responsibilities of this job?**

   When I first entered ministry, I was surprised by the amount of administration it required. I quickly adapted, and I now consider it a strength. I pride myself on being a man of my word, and to me that means being organized so that I can follow through on my responsibilities. In my last role, I managed the entire administration, including volunteer recruitment, event planning, service planning, creating policies, budget management, and more for two ministries. This experience makes me entirely confident I can handle these responsibilities.

3. **Describe your experiences establishing and managing a ministry budget.**

   At New Heights Church, I was entirely responsible for my own budget. I planned, tracked, and managed the budget for two ministries, all with the heart of honoring God through these finances. I developed different systems, including tracking apps and other processes to monitor transactions so that I could steward finances well. Even in my current corporate role – while obtaining my MDiv – I work in the accounting department. I am very confident in my ability to faithfully steward a ministry budget.

4. **Please share examples of how you handle conflict and criticism.**

   Over the course of my career in ministry, I have had to develop my conflict resolution skills. Growing up in a conflict-avoidant family, I did not realize my tendency to avoid conflict until I was hired as the youth pastor at Hillside Church in Minnesota. I quickly grew in my comfort level with conflict, but the real growth happened when I was hired at New Heights Church in Fairfield, Ohio.

   New Heights Church, formerly known as Tri-County Assembly, has been in existence for over sixty years. God had blessed the church in many ways, but the church had also experienced many tragic crises. To elaborate on every situation would be beyond the limits of this response.

   To be clear, when I was hired, the church had hired a faithful Lead Pastor to revitalize the church. Our lead pastor, with God's help, has been leading the church back to health, and today the church is as healthy as it has ever been. At the same time, churches with a deep history of sin do not heal overnight. As I was promised during my

initial interview there, I have faced significant conflict several times during my ministry at New Heights Church.

Two recent situations illustrate my approach to conflict resolution. In youth ministry, a new family became involved in repeated conflicts with students. After reports of harassment, I began with a private conversation, which initially appeared to resolve the issue. However, further incidents occurred, including inappropriate public confrontations and reports of the mother following and harassing students – even into the bathroom. After multiple attempts at reconciliation, I escalated the matter to church leadership. The decision was made to ask the family to leave. I communicated that decision as lovingly and clearly as possible while offering ways I could continue ministering to them outside church services.

A similar situation occurred in Young Adults Ministry. An individual became frustrated after I explained that I could not restore them to leadership. I later approached them to seek reconciliation while maintaining my decision. When that attempt failed, I involved our Executive Pastor as a mediator, following the principles of Matthew 18. The conflict initially appeared resolved. Months later, however, the individual physically assaulted two young adults and publicly attacked my character. After investigating the incident, our Lead Pastor determined that the individual should leave the ministry. Both experiences demonstrate the importance of pursuing reconciliation while escalating serious conflicts when necessary.

5. **How would you recruit, develop, disciple, and engage volunteers and lay leaders?**

   In my ministry, I have followed two simple guidelines. Be clear on what you expect. Invest heavily in those who meet the expectations. That begins with defining success for the volunteer position and then establishing the criteria necessary for achieving that goal. Once that work has been done, you must inform the volunteers and lay leaders what the expectations are. For me, this includes policy handbooks and clear guidelines. After all, you cannot hold someone to expectations that you don't communicate. Then you can unleash the leaders to fulfill their roles. My role is simply to put the people in a position to succeed.

   Secondly, I have always invested heavily in the leadership teams that I have led. If I ask a lot, I must be willing to provide a lot. I am a relational leader, and I love building relationships with those I lead, both inside and outside of the church. This is a definite strength of mine and would serve me well in this role.

6. **What lessons have you learned in your previous employment that you found helpful and plan to implement?**

   Over the course of my five years of vocational ministry – as a youth pastor and young adults pastor – the biggest lesson I have learned is that faithfulness equals success. I grew up in a 10,000-person mega church, and their vision for ministry was all that I knew. Success was determined by attendance, giving, and semi-biblical criteria at best. Over the last two years, through God's leading and intentional study, I have

undergone a radical shift in my pastoral theology. I now view my role as being faithful to God by preaching, teaching, and loving His people in accordance with His word.

7. **What is your strategy to implement change?**

   I don't know. And I say that intentionally. I don't think you can truly develop your strategy until you understand the Lead Pastor's expectations, along with the church's culture. Part of determining change is learning more about the people and the church. That should happen quickly, but at this point in the process, I can't say what, if anything, that might mean. I can say that I have orchestrated successful change in every ministry area that I have led, and I feel confident in my ability to do it again, but that does not mean it's always necessary.