



## **A Statement from the Advance Global Team Regarding the Mullen Report**

*December 9, 2021*

On August 13, 2021, the Advance Movement's Global Leadership Team engaged independent assessor Wade Mullen to assess both PJ Smyth and the Advance Movement regarding the handling of allegations against PJ in 2017. The final "Mullen Report" of that assessment is now publicly available and we accept the report as well as the assessor's recommendations. In this statement, we will describe the actions we have now determined to make.

We would like to thank Wade Mullen for his tireless efforts to finish this report quickly and for his commitment to the truth. A commitment that he notes, when taken up by all of us, "will demonstrate the transformative love of Jesus, which is able to liberate and heal the individuals who have been affected by these matters and the greater church community of Advance and Monument."

After many months of difficulty, waiting and relational distance due to this process, we have engaged with PJ to bring this investigation and assessment process to a conclusion. We have received the Mullen Report, provided it to PJ, and have laid out the determinations that we have come to as a team based on the findings and recommendations of the report.

### **Our Determinations for the Advance Movement**

An important aspect of the assessment is that the Advance Global team needs to take ownership of our own failings in handling the 2017 allegations as well as anything else that the report has revealed. The Mullen Report indicates that we were negligent in fully investigating the allegations against PJ. The report also explains that we relied too heavily on the perspectives PJ provided and the conclusions of others at the time, for which we need to take responsibility. We would like to start by apologizing to those affected by our actions.

We apologize first to the victims of John Smyth, for whom our negligence may have added to the pain and grief you have suffered. We are grieved that our actions may have prolonged your pain or perpetuated feelings that the full truth surrounding John Smyth was not being acknowledged.

We apologize to the pastors in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, who first raised these issues, for how this did not immediately lead us to conducting our own thorough investigation. It is now clear that we should have done so given that PJ was the leader of our movement. We would also like to express our gratitude for their willingness to raise the flag and their grace-filled manner in this whole journey.

We apologize to those who were elders at Covenant Life Church at that time. If we had been more proactive in coming alongside you in your investigations, we could have helped to alleviate the burden this later became to your church.

We apologize to Monument Church that began out of a disagreement at Covenant Life Church. While Monument was planted with the blessing of the Covenant Life Church elders, there was also pain and cost involved in the process. Not all those who joined Monument did so with full knowledge of what had taken place and we believe there should have been greater transparency in starting this new church.

We apologize to any others who raised concerns and were not appropriately heard. We will endeavor to make sure that we are better at creating safe places for concerns to be raised and develop more rigorous means for them to be considered.

We are thankful to the Newfrontiers Fellowship, our partners in global mission, who walked this road with us, then and now, and we apologize that we failed to exercise the leadership insight and fortitude to take these matters further in the right moments.

We also apologize to our Advance Movement of churches and leaders. We are so grateful for the many Advance partner churches who have affirmed their commitment and dedication to our shared mission despite these circumstances. That has added to our motivation to take valuable lessons away from this situation and to learn and grow in wise, biblical handling of these types of issues.

Our aim has always been to glorify Christ in the power of the Spirit through transparency, vulnerability, humility and, as difficult as this situation has been, we trust God to continue to lead us as we emerge from these matters. We must recognize, along with all of our churches, that while this process comes to a conclusion, our collective learning and work is far from over.

We would like to convey our commitment to take seriously the recommendations of the Mullen Report and to do the work necessary to lead our movement forward in greater honesty, transparency and accountability, while learning and growing in what it means to be both trauma-aware and trauma-informed. We believe we will collectively be stronger for it.

### **Our Regard for PJ Smyth**

We have communicated our deep love to PJ and Ashleigh and reminded him that, in the ten years since Advance first began, he has been our leader, brother, and friend. We have learned so much from him, been grateful to serve alongside him, and wanted to be in his corner whenever possible. We recognize and want to appreciate PJ for the way that he has served so long and so well, contributing so much to so many churches and lives. We want to applaud him for helping found our movement, developing vital materials and important resources, teaching in our churches, encouraging our teams, and activating Christ-followers in their God-given gifts and abilities, ourselves included. PJ has affected the lives of so many and God has done so much through his life and ministry.

Secondly, we have conveyed our collective apology to the Smyths for where we have not been trauma-aware and trauma-informed, or downplayed the impact or pain of PJ's experiences. The Mullen Report references the work of a psychologist whose "assessments and interviews suggest clearly that he is a trauma survivor and that 'he has responded to those traumas in ways that are credibly within the norm for trauma survivors.'" We have been grieved to learn about the impact of this terrible history and want to proceed with sensitivity and care for PJ. We have also apologized for our insensitivity and our lack of care and consideration for him in this process. It has been a complex situation and at times has felt nearly impossible to serve both getting to the truth and giving due regard to the suffering PJ has experienced. We undoubtedly missed the mark at times and for that we are deeply sorry.

We understand that behavior can be greatly influenced by traumatic experiences and this certainly impacts the issues that have been raised in the report. We are determined to work with and support PJ in his recovery process. Along with that commitment to walk beside PJ, we are also committed to the responsibility we have to lead the movement.

In this regard, the Mullen Report recommends that Advance put a more defined process in place for dealing with these types of situations as well as become more trauma-aware and trauma-informed as a leadership team. It is regrettable that such a process has not been in existence within our movement for us to call on and follow. We intend to follow through on these recommendations and put such a process in place as well as continue to seek help in becoming more trauma-aware and trauma-informed as a leadership team and movement.

### **Our Determinations Regarding PJ Smyth**

As of December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021 we required PJ to step down from the leadership of the Advance Movement and the global leadership team. Considering the findings of this report, including the revelations of his own trauma, we believe that it is both right and appropriate that he step down from all forms of ministry for an undetermined period and would also counsel against him assuming a leadership role in any local church in this season.

The report highlights areas where PJ's character and conduct have not met the biblical expectations of an overseer (1 Tim 3 / Titus 1). It is likely that the trauma he experienced from his father has played a major role in some or all of these areas of concern. That said, we have also called PJ to recognize and deal with these areas of his life and actions and we desire that he embrace a season of personal healing and wholeness and a formal process of restoration.

In all these matters we have reassured PJ that we are committed to him and, while we are not yet sure of everything this journey would entail, were he to submit himself to these determinations and "bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matt 3:8), it is our great hope that we would see him restored.

### **Main Reasons for Requiring PJ to Step Down from Leadership:**

- 1) **False Statements & Lack of Full Disclosure:** It is clear from the report that at several points in the 2017 process of PJ being questioned about his knowledge of John Smyth's history, he did not disclose important information. The report illustrates how involved he had been in the accusations against his father and the significant number of interactions, correspondences and negotiations in which he participated. Even if this lack of disclosure and transparency were a consequence of trauma, it had significant consequences for Advance, the church he led then and the church he leads now.
- 2) **Not 'Above Reproach':** The report makes clear that PJ has not been above reproach. The report outlines that the credibility concerns reach beyond the 2017 statements. We therefore do not see that PJ meets the biblical criteria of being above reproach at this time.
- 3) **Leadership Incongruencies & Lack of True Accountability:** It seems clear from the report and our personal experience as a team that PJ has not consistently lived out the ethics and values that we collectively agreed on and together publicly taught. The report confirms patterns of refusal to be accountable and transparent. While we have experienced PJ acting

with some level of accountability in our team, we have recognized that he has been evasive and unaccountable in some critical areas.

- 4) **Anger & Defensiveness:** As Mullen puts it, there is an “existence of legitimate concerns regarding PJ Smyth related to patterns of behavior observed and reported to this assessor by multiple participants across multiple contexts. These patterns concern trustworthiness and consistency in communication and anger and defensiveness when confronted.”

### **Comment on the Covenant Life Season**

While the Mullen Report includes a portion about PJ’s time at Covenant Life Church in 2018, it is important to recognize that Mullen states, “It is beyond the scope of this assessment to draw conclusions regarding all the reasons for CLC and PJ Smyth separating.” Therefore we have not relied heavily upon this part of the report in reaching our conclusions. However, we do recognize some of the negative patterns of behavior which the report touches on from that season and that these are consistent with experiences of PJ in other contexts.

### **In Conclusion**

We recognize that this is a very difficult decision we have come to in asking PJ to step down. But as we have grappled, prayed, weighed, and considered, we do so with full confidence that this is right to do for everyone concerned.

We are not sure how this decision will shape the leadership landscape of our movement going forward. As a team we have felt God’s caution not to make any hasty decisions in this regard, but rather to wait on Him and give ourselves to a continued season of leading collaboratively. We all trust God to make His will known to us, in His perfect time.

We would like to thank everyone who is deeply invested in this situation and appreciate the patience and grace it has required to await the outcome. As those who hold to the full hope of the gospel, it is our hope that there is a redemptive story unfolding here under God’s sovereign hand, not only for PJ but also for Monument Church and the Advance Movement of churches we so dearly love and serve. We would appreciate your continued prayers as we move forward in our mission to plant and strengthen churches.

### **The Advance Global Team**

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