To Members of Hope Church,

The purpose of this letter is to update you on the challenging situation we discussed in our all church meeting in December and ask for your prayers during this time.

On Saturday, February 11th, the Arizona Daily Star released an article about our church with the title 'Church with Tucson roots accused of stalking, hazing, at Arizona State'. Since this article was released, a few different articles (based off the AZ Daily Star article) have also surfaced, including the Arizona Republic. In addition to this, ASU is continuing its investigation into the report that was submitted to the ASU Student Rights and Responsibilities Office (SRR) in July of 2016. In light of the investigation, the recent articles, and our desire to be transparent, we’d like to update you on some recent events to give some context to our situation.

As you may already know, Hope Church started 12.5 years ago as a church plant of Faith Christian Church (FCC) in Tucson, Arizona. Due to our growing concerns that FCC was a closed system, some of their ministry practices were unhealthy, and that they were unwilling to discuss these concerns, our fellowship with them ceased and we haven’t had contact with them for 11.5 years. Since then, our senior leadership team has strived to build a healthy, open ministry culture. We know that building this kind of ministry culture takes time and we make mistakes, which is why for the past 11.5 years we’ve taken the time to look inside through prayer and fasting, and we’ve sought coaching and training from numerous other ministry leaders and pastors. In addition, we’ve joined the Grace Association of Churches (GA) in 2005 for support and accountability

In 2014, we heard a few stories from ministry leaders in the ASU community about students who had negative experiences with our church. We were saddened to hear this but because these stories were general in nature (no specific names or incidents were given), we went on a ‘Listening Tour’ and met with other ministry leaders at ASU to solicit their feedback, learn from any mistakes we made, and share our desire to reconcile with anyone that’s been hurt or offended. In addition to this, and because our church is accountable to the GA, we asked them to conduct their own review. The goal of their review was to interview other ministry leaders at ASU to learn more about students who had negative experiences and offer us recommendations for growth and change. During their review, they too were not given any specific student names or incidents, but nonetheless, they identified 6 key areas where refinement of ministry practices was suggested. With the help of the GA, we developed some next steps which included:

1. Developing a ‘Hope Campus Ministry Best Practices Manual’
   a. Including hours of staff training on these ‘Best Practices’
2. Instituting a new Staff Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct
3. Receiving 44 hours of training from ASU’s Community Assistant & Paraprofessional Training through ASU Residential Life

As we’ve developed systematic training in these areas, we’ve come to the conclusion that it was our mistake to not develop this training sooner. Although many of the practices in our training have been a part of our culture for a number of years, having them clearly written for training purposes is key to maintain the highest level of excellence. The GA has helped us see that systematic training is the only way to maintain and sustain a healthy ministry culture for years to come. Because of this, we’re very thankful for the ‘Listening Tour’, the GA’s review, and believe God is using this to prepare us for future growth.
Parallel to all of this, we learned on June 7th, 2016 that a few students were compiling a report of complaints against our church. This report was submitted to the SRR Office of ASU in July of 2016. The report consists of Conduct violations. At first, these complaints appeared organic in nature, but we’ve since learned that their intention of discrediting our ministry and removing our church from the campus. Although ASU has not their stories to it, but declined. After reviewing one of the reports that was given to us, we learned that the lead student involved in creating it claimed he was ‘consulting with a former employee of Hope’ who helped get other campus churches removed from their campuses, and asked students to ‘fit their stories’ into a designed framework which would get ASU’s attention. As intended, the report and recent media coverage has gotten the attention of ASU Officials, the ASU Council of Religious Advisors, local news stations, and other ministry leaders in the ASU community and in the Phoenix area.

Although we met with SRR in July and in November of 2016, they still have yet to hear our side of the allegations. To our knowledge, the only information SRR has about the allegations against our church has come from this group of detractors. Next week, we will begin a series of meetings with SRR to share our perspective. We look forward to working with ASU and giving them all the information we have to assist in their investigation. We’ve taken this process seriously and have spent hundreds of hours reviewing the report, interviewing our staff about the specific incidences, and developing a written response to each individual allegation. Our staff has a different perspective on each of the allegations in the report, which we’ll be sharing respectfully with SRR throughout this process.

In the meantime, 5 of the 6 student clubs we regularly partner with (Man Up ASU WOW Factor! ASU, Sun Devil Survivor, Sun Devils Wear Prada, and Outlaw Comedy) were found responsible for Code of Conduct violations by ASU and they’ve received 4 years of probation. During this probationary period, the clubs can still operate on campus, but are unable to conduct club activities in the Residence Halls. The club’s student officers are currently meeting with ASU officials to clarify the terms of their probation and work through concerns they have about the process. Please direct any specific questions about the clubs to the respective student officers.

Above all, our desire is to resolve this situation Biblically, respect the confidentiality of the individuals involved, and respect the authority of the University. At this time, we’re asking our church to be praying for the truth to emerge, and the ASU administrators to understand the strategy of these detractors. Please know, we are always open to sit down with someone we’ve offended, and even include a mutually agreed neutral third party if necessary. If you didn’t attend our last all church meeting in December and would like a copy of the letter given during that time, please email Jason Shaffery at Jason@Hope4asu.org. We are completely open to answer any questions and are encouraged to see what God is doing in our church and at ASU.

Sincerely,

Brian & Wendy Smith and The Leadership Team of Hope Church

P.O. Box 7336 | Tempe, AZ 85281 | (480) 560-2277 | www.hope4asu.org | info@hope4asu.org