



WE ARE YOUR GUIDEPOST.

# Organizational Assessment Vineyard USA

June 20, 2023

Robb Morgan, Managing Director  
Vineyard USA  
5115 Grove West Blvd.  
Stafford, TX 77477  
[Robb.morgan@vineyardusa.org](mailto:Robb.morgan@vineyardusa.org)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ..... 3

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 4

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY ..... 7

VINEYARD USA STRUCTURE..... 9

GOVERNING DOCUMENTS..... 14

ANALYSIS OF CURRENT VINEYARD STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE ..... 18

RECOMMENDATIONS ..... 36

CONCLUSION ..... 40

# INTRODUCTION

The Vineyard USA is a 501(c)(3) organization which at present is collectively led by a National Team<sup>1</sup>, support staff, and volunteer leaders made up of Vineyard pastors and staff which provides support and guidance to the U.S. based locally governed Vineyard churches and pastors. Vineyard USA serves as the convening entity for Vineyard churches in the U.S. Since early 2022, Vineyard USA began developing “a broadly consultative, transparent process for making proposals around church affiliation to Vineyard USA.”<sup>2</sup> In doing so, Vineyard USA identified barriers for it to respond well to current and historical cases of leadership misconduct, moral failings, and allegations of abuse or other concerns occurring at a church due to the structure and governance model of the movement. Vineyard USA’s desire was to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the movement under the current structure and governance model, and to explore what changes could be made to help the movement respond better to various crises that impacted Vineyard affiliated churches and to provide better support to Vineyard pastors and congregation members during these challenging events.

On September 12, 2022, in line with Vineyard USA’s commitment to this effort, the National Team engaged Guidepost Solutions (“Guidepost”) to conduct an independent institutional assessment of Vineyard USA and its affiliated churches, with the goal to better understand what organizational safeguarding policies and structural reforms would be beneficial for the continued health and growth of the movement, consistent with the Vineyard’s core values and beliefs.

From the beginning of our engagement, the Vineyard USA’s leadership, National Team staff, as well as the Vineyard pastors we spoke to, demonstrated a commitment to transparency and openness.<sup>3</sup> Relevant documents and communications requested by Guidepost were produced. Guidepost communicated regularly with Vineyard USA’s Managing Director, Communications Director, and an Advisory Panel, who consistently supported our work.

A key component of our assessment was our independence. The assessment was conducted, and this Report was written without any undue influence by Vineyard USA. The findings herein are solely our own. The Engagement Letter expressly provided that Vineyard USA “has not instructed Guidepost [on] how to conduct its investigation and is relying on Guidepost’s stated expertise in the manner of rendering the services described in the Engagement.”<sup>4</sup> There is no attorney-client relationship between Guidepost and any other party and none of the communications between Guidepost and the Vineyard USA or its affiliates are protected by the attorney-client privilege.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Vineyard USA National Team has been referred to by other names throughout the history of the movement and is referred to by the respective names throughout this report as appropriate. Pre-2013, the leadership was referred to as Board of Directors. From 2013 to 2021, the leadership was referred to as the Executive Team.

<sup>2</sup> <https://vineyardusa.org/guidepost-assessment/>

<sup>3</sup> Eleven Vineyard pastors declined to speak to Guidepost.

<sup>4</sup> Guidepost/Vineyard USA Letter of Engagement (October 5, 2022). Vineyard USA also issued a statement detailing the engagement. <https://vineyardusa.org/guidepost-assessment/>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## A. ASSESSMENT OBSERVATIONS

*For consistent reference within this report, Guidepost will use the terms, "Vineyard movement in the United States" as the organizational entirety; "Vineyard USA" as the national office/staff; and "Local churches and pastors" when referring to Vineyard churches and pastors.*

The Vineyard movement in the United States has a rich history of creativity, church autonomy and dependence on strong personal relationships which have allowed the organization to function for over 50 years. However, as we detail throughout this report, we found the Vineyard movement in the United States lacked any concrete structure, governance, and/or standards often leading to confusion on issues of authority and accountability. Any successful organization including a ministry must have effective communication of mission, values, priorities, and the ethical and responsible execution of those. It does not exist separate from organizational culture. The Vineyard movement in the United States currently lacks effective execution of its mission and values across its more than 500 Vineyard churches. While local churches may execute their respective mission and values within their own entities, the movement itself is hindered because it lacks an ability to act cohesively and to address issues consistently.

## B. SUMMARY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While we speak of our findings in much greater detail throughout this report, we identified three critical areas which put the effectiveness of the Vineyard USA and local Vineyard churches at risk. Within this report, we provide details relevant to our summary findings which are:

1. Minimal structure or formal connection of Vineyard USA to local Vineyard churches and pastors;
2. No documented reporting mechanism or response processes for allegations or concerns of misconduct across the Vineyard movement in the United States; and
3. Lack of meaningful standards, guidance, or accountability for Vineyard USA and Vineyard church staff, pastors, and leaders.

As a result of our summary findings and analysis, we identified several recommendations for Vineyard USA's consideration and action as appropriate. These recommendations are consistent with the core values, beliefs, and philosophy of the Vineyard movement in the United States.

## Finding 1: Minimal Structure or Formal Connection of Vineyard USA to Local Vineyard Churches and Pastors

### Recommendations

1(a).	<u>Formalize the Relationship between Vineyard USA and local Vineyard Churches.</u>
1(b).	<u>Vetting:</u> Vineyard USA should establish a process for vetting and require comprehensive background checks of newly onboarded Vineyard USA staff, Area and Regional Leaders, and local Vineyard church senior pastors at least every five years.
1(c).	<u>Ordination and Credentialing:</u> Vineyard USA and local Vineyard churches should work together to establish a process for joint ordination/credentialing of pastors within the Vineyard movement in the United States.
1(d).	<u>Pastoral Code of Conduct:</u> Working with local Vineyard churches and pastors, Vineyard USA should document a pastoral Code of Conduct that identifies standards expected of all Vineyard pastors around personal and ministerial behavior, integrity, stewardship, character, and accountability.
1(e).	<u>Oversight Process:</u> Vineyard USA should document a process to investigate, discipline, and/or terminate a pastor for misconduct.
1(f).	<u>Operations Handbook:</u> Vineyard USA should create an operations handbook that connects Vineyard pastors and churches together through a set of standardized operational policies and procedures; requirements and expectations of churches and pastors; and reporting protocols.
1(g).	<u>Church Good Standing Determinations:</u> Vineyard USA should document “good standing” values and requirements for newly opened and adopted Vineyard Churches in the operational handbook.
1(h).	<u>Healthy Church Guidance Toolbox:</u> Vineyard USA should provide a “Toolbox” to local churches that includes providing guidance, best practices, model protocols and policies.
1(i).	<u>Continue to Enhance Training and Programming for Leadership, Staff, and Volunteers:</u> Vineyard USA should create and provide training programs to support any newly created policies or processes.
1(j).	<u>Increased Super Regional Leader (“SRL”) Resourcing:</u> Vineyard USA should consider increasing the number of SRLs to enhance engagement and feedback from local Vineyard churches and pastors to Vineyard USA and vice versa.
1(k).	<u>Vineyard USA Leadership Training:</u> Vineyard USA should conduct yearly training for Area Leader/Regional Leaders/SRLs at a conference, retreat, and/or celebration to teach as well as transform and inspire attendees, to give them renewed commitment and vision.
1(l).	<u>Annual Census:</u> In an annual Vineyard census, Vineyard USA should request information regarding church financial health, reports and allegations of abuse and misconduct, and/or concerns relative to church governance.

**Finding 2: No Documented Reporting Mechanism or Response Processes for Allegations or Concerns of Misconduct Across the Vineyard Movement in the United States**

**Recommendations**

2(a).	<u>24-hour Reporting Email</u> : Vineyard USA should continue to make available the Reporting Email to receive reports of concerns of leadership misconduct.
2(b).	<u>Reporting Email Visibility</u> : Vineyard USA should more prominently highlight the Reporting email on Vineyard websites, making it available on its main page. Vineyard USA should also encourage local churches and other affiliates of Vineyard USA to highlight the reporting email.
2(c).	<u>Process for Responding to Allegations of Misconduct in Churches</u> : Vineyard USA should document a consistent reporting, investigation, adjudication, and resolution process. The process should include policies on confidentiality, conflicts of interest, non-retaliation, record keeping, and whistleblower protections.
2(d).	<u>Support to Local Churches</u> : Vineyard USA should develop vetted resources including legal, investigative, and counseling resources to support local churches in their investigations of misconduct based upon church and pastor standards.
2(e).	<u>Conciliation/Mediation</u> : Vineyard USA should vet any conciliation/mediation service used and ensure that the service providers are trauma informed.

**Finding 3: Lack of Meaningful Standards, Guidance, or Accountability for Vineyard USA Staff**

**Recommendations**

3(a).	<u>Employee Manual</u> : Vineyard USA should review the Employee Manual, and update or add policies that would provide meaningful standards, guidelines, or accountability for Vineyard USA staff.
3(b).	<u>A Leadership Focused Handbook</u> : Vineyard USA should clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of the Vineyard USA National Team, and Regional and Area leadership.

# SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

## A. SCOPE

Pursuant to the Engagement Letter between Vineyard USA and Guidepost, Guidepost was hired to conduct “a structural and process-focused review of the Vineyard USA and its relationships with its estimated [5]00 congregations.”<sup>5</sup> Guidepost assessed Vineyard USA’s overarching relational and legal connections, practices, policies, methods of communication, and governance and accountability between Vineyard USA and local Vineyard churches. Guidepost was not engaged to conduct investigations of any past or present reports of leadership misconduct, moral failings, and/or allegations of abuse.

This Report sets forth our factual findings and a recommended framework for Vineyard USA to consider improving the accountability and functionality of the relationship between Vineyard USA and its affiliated churches.

## B. METHODOLOGY

During the course of our assessment, we used standard investigative practices to gather relevant information, including but not limited to preparing and submitting comprehensive document requests to relevant parties; reviewing and analyzing all relevant documents obtained from all sources; contacting or attempting to contact and interview relevant Vineyard USA staff, Vineyard church affiliated staff, and other witnesses identified by Vineyard USA or through our assessment as being relevant; and conducting witness interviews. Of paramount importance was affording witnesses an opportunity to share their insights and histories with us, if they so desired, and providing transparency to them about the assessment process.

We maintained regular contact with the Managing Director and the Communications Director relative to our developments in our assessment process. We also requested access to a broader group of Vineyard leaders to ensure that our work was being communicated fully, to ensure transparency, and to create a forum for us to seek additional information. To that end, Vineyard USA created an Advisory Panel which consisted of a group of Vineyard USA National Team members and local Vineyard pastors.<sup>6</sup> The Advisory Panel was available for consultation relative to culture, systems, and governance issues. They received briefings at significant stages of the engagement, and they also served as representatives to local Vineyard churches to answer questions and update on the status of the engagement.

During our engagement, we provided two formal briefings to the Advisory Panel on November 1, 2022, and March 15, 2023. Additionally, we spoke to individuals separately in their role as Advisors and on an as needed basis to provide information relative to specific issues. The Advisory Panel played an important role in our understanding of Vineyard process and culture, and we are grateful to them for their assistance.

---

<sup>5</sup> Guidepost/Vineyard USA letter of Engagement (October 5, 2022). Vineyard USA also issued a statement detailing the engagement. <https://vineyardusa.org/guidepost-assessment/>

## **1. Collection and Review of Documents, Case Studies, and Other Evidentiary Items**

As part of the assessment, we collected and reviewed hundreds of documents and other relevant evidentiary items. These documents included bylaws, policies, manuals, church adoption and church plant legal packets, the Vineyard Trademark License, and other materials pertaining to relevant matters.

As part of the assessment, Vineyard USA also provided a list of case studies for Guidepost to review for historical information. Vineyard USA presented these case studies to Guidepost as examples of how Vineyard USA and affiliated churches have handled leadership misconduct, moral failings, restoration processes, allegations of abuse and misconduct, and other issues. Vineyard USA provided Guidepost with case study documentation when available, including investigation reports, internal notes, meeting minutes, governance documents, emails and other correspondence, social media communications, leadership communications, and other relevant documents. Guidepost also reviewed documents provided to us from reporters and witnesses, including emails and correspondence with Vineyard USA leadership. Guidepost also performed background research to find publicly available information on the case studies. All these documents informed and guided our interviews with witnesses.

For the purposes of this report, we do not detail the specifics of each case study due to their sensitive nature and the potential the studies could identify involved parties. However, Guidepost did incorporate relevant insights from these case studies into our analysis. We have separately provided a more detailed recounting of the facts and impact of the case studies to Vineyard USA for their internal visibility only.

## **2. Interviews**

A key component of our investigation was our interviews with current and former Vineyard USA staff, pastors affiliated with local Vineyard churches and Vineyard USA, and relevant parties to the case studies (e.g., former national staff, pastors accused of misconduct, reporters of misconduct, relevant witnesses). These interviews helped us understand the issues facing Vineyard USA. We interviewed or attempted to interview all persons who might have had relevant information regarding the assessment, starting with a list of potential witnesses provided by Vineyard USA. We expanded that list based on our review of specific documents or based on individual interviews.

In total, we interviewed 43 individuals and reached out to 17 others in attempts to do an interview. Guidepost conducted trauma-informed witness interviews and offered confidentiality to the interviewees; therefore, you will see no mention of any name within this report unless specific consent was obtained. Instead, we utilized pseudonyms throughout this report, and certain identifying information was redacted or modified to maintain the confidentiality of witnesses. We prioritized communicating in a prompt and transparent manner with all witnesses. We are deeply grateful to those who shared their experiences and opinions.



# VINEYARD USA STRUCTURE

## A. BRIEF GOVERNANCE HISTORY<sup>6</sup> AND BACKGROUND

Vineyard in the United States refers to itself as a loose affiliation of Christian churches numbering more than 2000 across the world. The Vineyard movement in the United States currently includes about 121,000 people and over 500 churches in the United States.<sup>7</sup> The movement emerged in the late 1970s, after a period of significant spiritual awakening within the counterculture in the United States. It experienced exponential growth with dynamic and gifted leadership, revolutionary worship music, and the welcoming of nonconformist communities. Under the direction of one of Vineyard's founding leaders, John Wimber, who led the movement until his death in 1997, the movement grew as he influenced Vineyard pastors and emphasized the importance of multiplying Vineyard communities through church plants. He was gifted in his ability to help churches grow through evangelism and shaped the theology and practice of Vineyard churches.<sup>8</sup>

## B. JOHN WIMBER AND HIS VISION FOR VINEYARD CHURCHES

John Wimber was initially ordained as a Quaker minister. As his theological convictions led him to place greater value on the Holy Spirit's leading in modern churches through signs and wonders, he parted from the Quaker denomination and moved on to plant a Calvary Chapel church in 1977. As he began to experience the power of the Holy Spirit in ways more closely aligned with Pentecostal or Charismatic denominations, this became a catalyst for the Vineyard movement in the United States.

Evangelism was a core value in Wimber's ministerial convictions. Wimber was a fruitful evangelical pastor leading multiple Bible studies of hundreds of people as well as the Fuller Theological Seminary Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth. His vision was for Vineyard to be a church-planting movement, extending God's Kingdom work by helping churches to multiply through church plants. A key value that had defined the development of the movement was the freedom in allowing every local church and senior pastor to have the freedom to develop their own spiritual and congregational practices within their specific geographic and demographic area.

In birthing the Vineyard movement, Wimber and other early leaders intentionally established a loose affiliation of seven Christian churches in the Los Angeles area. While these early leaders did not originally set out to build a formal denomination, Wimber later recognized that the Association of Vineyard Churches "for better or for worse – is a denomination"<sup>9</sup>. Many in the movement even today are uncomfortable with

---

<sup>6</sup> Our review of governance history consisted of information gathered from interviews and other written sources. We did not locate a single source containing the complete history. We have done our due diligence in piecing the history together based on the information that was made available to us.

<sup>7</sup> <https://vineyardusa.org/2023annualreport/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://vineyardusa.org/about/john-wimber/>

<sup>9</sup> Wimber, J., "Steering a Course Between Chaos and Traditional Denominationalism," in *John Wimber's Pastoral Letters*, ed. and compiled by Derek Morphew (South Africa: Vineyard International Publishing, 2019), Oct./Nov. 1993 Volume 1, Issue 4, Kindle, 44.

the term denomination. However, in Wimber's pastoral letter entitled "Steering a Course Between Chaos and Traditional Denominationalism," he gives insight into his view on structure "as necessary to growth and survival."<sup>10</sup> He referenced the Army structure, where "you trade some personal freedom for the protection and encouragement of comrades in arms. Most pastors I've talked to recognize the wisdom in having some accountability structure."<sup>11</sup> He discussed the positives and negatives of being a denomination relying on Paul Hiebert.<sup>12</sup> Being a denomination provides benefits of good governance, oversight and accountability, mobilization of efforts to fulfill mission, theological unity, and aggregation of resources to minister and evangelize.<sup>13</sup> While there are benefits, Wimber acknowledged the negatives which he addressed by highlighting values that he believed should guide the Association of Vineyard Churches' approach to structure – minimal bureaucracy<sup>14</sup>, the importance of relationships, spiritual versus legal authority, local church autonomy, and decentralization.<sup>15</sup>

As for local church autonomy, Wimber believed that each Vineyard church did not need to be a clone of Vineyard Anaheim, but rather it should be allowed the freedom to form and exist in ways that recognized its individuality and culture of the surrounding community.<sup>16</sup> But he also recognized the importance of a "structured relationship among churches with a shared sense of calling."<sup>17</sup> Wimber's desire was for this grouping of churches to "freely express itself within the constraints of the values, theology, and genetic code of the Vineyard."<sup>18</sup> Wimber placed importance on the relationships and spiritual authority, rather than legal authority of the local church to the movement. There was an assumption that if you had spiritual authority, you would not need legal authority and if a church is not recognizant of the spiritual authority, then you would not want legal authority. Wimber stated, "I don't want to govern people who don't want governance from me. I don't want to bring correction or direction to people who don't recognize my spiritual authority."<sup>19</sup>

### C. THE ASSOCIATION OF VINEYARD CHURCHES

In the early 1980's as the number of Vineyard churches was growing rapidly, Wimber made the decision to formalize the structure of the movement. He stated that "to plant new churches, and not band them together and mature them is irresponsible."<sup>20</sup> The Association of Vineyard Churches ("AVC")<sup>21</sup> was incorporated in 1985 under California law, and the original bylaws were created. We were told that these earliest bylaws were created to provide some structure, but deliberately were written to be "thin" to allow the Holy Spirit to

---

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at 45.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 45.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* at 54-56. In Wimber's pastoral letter, "Steering a Course Between Chaos and Traditional Denominationalism" Wimber attributes these ideas to Paul Hiebert, a professor at Trinity Evangelical School; however, no citation is given to a specific work.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 54.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at 47. Wimber believed that the leaders should be those who are pastoring on the local level not leaders whose sole role was governance and operation of an organization. While recognizing the commitment and responsibility this carried for a local pastor to perform in both capacities, he thought that this approach would guard against loss of vision and avoid the temptation for self-preservation

<sup>15</sup> *Id.* at 47-49.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.* at 47. Vineyard Anaheim is considered the foundational Vineyard church planted by Wimber.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 46.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.* at 48.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* at 48.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 46.

<sup>21</sup> It appears that the Association of Vineyard Churches later became Vineyard USA around the time that the offices moved to Texas.

move and direct. The Bylaws were modeled after Calvary Chapel,<sup>22</sup> and they provided flexibility to the associated churches to move and grow without the AVC being able to hinder the church's movement with the Holy Spirit's leading. It appears that historically the bylaws included two classes of members – legal and associate. The legal members were designated as the voting members of the board which governed the AVC. The associate members were non-voting members and included Vineyard pastors who were in good standing.<sup>23</sup> However, in 2022 as part of the Re-Org, the bylaws were completely revised, and the corporation currently does not have members.<sup>24</sup>

## D. LOCAL CHURCH AUTONOMY AND ORGANIZATION

Throughout its history, the Vineyard movement in the United States emphasized creativity, autonomy and relational connection as opposed to any formal structure or governance. Each church functioned under its own authority being led by a senior pastor, with some fiduciary and eldership roles fulfilled by boards who were for the most part appointed by the senior pastor. While not mandatory, most Vineyard churches were incorporated as 501(c)(3) organizations pursuant to state law. Each church functioned under its own bylaws which were drafted and ratified without any significant or overarching guidance or accountability by Vineyard USA. While some church bylaws were similar to each other in the topics addressed, many differed broadly in a number of areas including their Statements of Faith; the role, composition, and authority of the local church boards; the accountability of the pastor to the board or to the congregation; and the documented relationship between the church and Vineyard USA. Of the five local church bylaws we reviewed, we did not see language to document or describe any accountability or formal connection to Vineyard USA. However, one pastor we interviewed who served as a Vineyard pastor for decades and held many roles within the Vineyard entities, provided the following insights: He advised his church to tailor its bylaws to empower the board to report inappropriate behavior of the pastor to Vineyard USA. For example, his church's bylaws stated that if the pastor ever strayed or engaged in behavior that was not edifying to the church that the board would report this conduct to Vineyard USA and invite them to address it. This pastor believes that a small minority of churches may have similarly drafted bylaws, but he believes it was very rare.

## E. LOCAL CHURCH USE OF THE VINEYARD TRADEMARK

The Trademark License between a local church and Vineyard USA provides legal and structural accountability to the movement. Since 2004, Vineyard USA has used a written formal Trademark License with local churches who desire to affiliate with the Vineyard movement in the United States and use the Vineyard USA trademarks ("Vineyard," "V" logo, and "La Vina"). In 2016, the Trademark License added requirements that the licensee church remit 3% of their monthly tithes and donations and meet other general trademark terms

---

<sup>22</sup> <https://calvarychapel.com/>

<sup>23</sup> 2001 Bylaws references the requirement for "good standing", and membership being "open to any pastor and church body who acknowledges and accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who is willing to subscribe to the policies of this corporation, who is committed to the priorities and to its values and who is approved by the Board of Directors or that person or those persons the Board of Directors assigns to approve churches for affiliation."

<sup>24</sup> The Re-Org was a 2020 strategic review of the Vineyard movement in the United States.

enumerated in the Trademark License. Additional details and limitations of the Trademark License are discussed later in the report.

## F. RELIANCE ON RELATIONAL CONNECTION OF VINEYARD USA TO LOCAL VINEYARD CHURCHES

In terms of support of or accountability over local church pastors, Vineyard USA relied on a *relational* influence rather than a more formalized accountability structure, to connect the local Vineyard churches to each other and to the national Vineyard USA office. This model of relational influence was built on personal familiarization and friendship across the Vineyard community. Relational influence allowed the movement to grow exponentially in its early days, with pastors planting churches at a rapid pace with little accountability or vetting of the pastors. Vineyard USA had little awareness of the local churches' internal accountability structures such as their functional and legal boards, bylaws, or if the pastor or Statement of Faith aligned with Vineyard USA.

Vineyard USA established the roles of volunteer Area Leaders and Regional Leaders<sup>25</sup> to foster relational oversight to local churches and pastors. There were no established criteria or requirements for the Area and Regional Leader positions, but the positions were generally filled by pastors from well-established Vineyard churches who understood the ministry needs and culture of the geographic area. While these volunteer leaders served as a bridge between the local church and Vineyard USA, they lacked any uniformly understood authority to act or require local church pastors to participate in Area or Regional meetings. Area and Regional Leaders had no common understanding of their responsibilities commissioned by Vineyard USA, had no consistent training to help them conduct their volunteer roles, and technically were not even accountable to Vineyard USA themselves. As the number of churches grew, the movement's lack of cohesion strained the relationship between local churches and the national office of Vineyard USA. As a result of Vineyard USA's inability to support and respond consistently to local church issues, the churches continued to grow in their autonomy.

## G. 2020 VINEYARD USA REORG

As a result of the ineffectiveness of the relational oversight structure, in early 2020, Vineyard USA commissioned a strategic review of the Vineyard movement ("The ReOrg") in the United States. The 2020 ReOrg's purpose was to "intentionally refocus, resource, and reorganize the Vineyard USA, in order to more effectively equip, encourage, and empower local church pastors for the work of ministry."<sup>26</sup> The historical review of the movement and various events and issues that involved Vineyard churches, made clear the realities and challenges faced by Vineyard USA. Those challenges included slow growth in church plants; an increase in the number of closed or disassociated churches compared to the number of church plants; the

---

<sup>25</sup> These volunteer roles have been known by various titles over the history of the Vineyard movement in the United States including Area Pastor Coordinators, Area Pastor Care Leaders, Regional Overseers, and District Overseers.

<sup>26</sup> Vineyard USA Reorganization Update – April 2021.

increase in the number of senior pastors approaching retirement age but lack of successors to take over their ministries; limited growth in congregational members; volunteer Area Leaders and Regional Leaders being overly extended and disempowered; the increase in the number of Vineyard churches involved with issues of allegations of misconduct, abuse, and moral failures; and Vineyard USA having no authority other than relational persuasion over local Vineyard churches.

As a result of the issues identified in the ReOrg, in 2022 Vineyard USA worked to enhance the Vineyard USA National Team by hiring four full-time Associate National Directors, a full-time Communications Director, a full-time Managing Director, three full-time Super Regional Leaders (SRLs), and realigned two existing positions into full-time roles of a Chief Financial Officer and an Events Director to reinforce the bridge between Vineyard USA and local Vineyard churches. The SRLs oversee the nine Regional Leaders and 66 Area Leaders on the ground to support the local churches.<sup>27</sup> In addition to the three SRL positions, the ReOrg identified additional pastoral and support roles for Vineyard USA that were necessary to provide better training and care for local pastors. Currently, Vineyard USA is staffed with 12 full-time leadership positions including the National Director, Jay Pathak<sup>28</sup> who has served in this position since October 2021. Also, in January 2022, Vineyard USA installed its current Board of Trustees which is comprised of six members both from within and outside the Vineyard movement in the United States.<sup>29</sup> As of the writing of this report, the Trustees have only met once formally and their role is still being developed.<sup>30</sup> Much of the current structure of Vineyard USA resulted from the 2020 ReOrg review, which is broadly discussed and communicated in detail on Vineyard's website.<sup>31</sup>

## **H. POST - REORG/CURRENT VINEYARD USA GOVERNANCE AND STRUCTURE AND THE NATIONAL TEAM**

Through 2022 to date, the National Team has worked to explore and implement ways for the movement to become a strongly connected national family of healthy churches, in a way that respects each church's independence while fostering more transparency and accountability to each other. The National Team has worked to develop systems and gather resources to equip, encourage and further empower local pastors and churches. They also conducted a survey of local churches in 2022, to gather information about each church including size, location, and demographics; financial standing of the church including income, expenses, budget, debt, and savings; pastor's compensation; pastor's financial well-being; needs of the church; challenges faced by the church; and personal and professional financial stressors faced by pastors. The survey results made clear that financial health is one of the most pressing needs of Vineyard pastors and churches. The survey ultimately helped the National Team put together a successful grant proposal, after which Vineyard USA was awarded a \$1 million Lilly Endowment Inc.'s Thriving in Ministry grant to be

---

<sup>27</sup> Currently, only two of the three SRL positions are filled due to one resignation during our engagement. There are three areas which do not currently have an Area Leader.

<sup>28</sup> <https://vineyardusa.org/national-team/>

<sup>29</sup> These members had a variety of current and historic relationships with the Vineyard movement in the United States.

<sup>30</sup> The board continues to fill some existing vacancies.

<sup>31</sup> Vineyard USA Reorganization Update April 2021.

used to support the financial wellness of Vineyard pastors, local church boards, and congregations.<sup>32</sup>

## I. ENTITIES, INITIATIVES AND ASSOCIATIONS

Throughout the years, Vineyard USA has established entities and initiatives that provided direct support to Vineyard churches and pastors related to various ministries including, but not limited to worship, church planting, missions, kids, and youth. Vineyard USA also established associations to serve historically under-represented groups in the Vineyard movement. Associations function to provide intentional environments for leadership development, mentoring, and hospitality, as well as formal structures for diverse voices to be heard by the Vineyard USA National Team. The Associations included a Hispanic Association, Black Pastors and Leaders Association, Women's Association, and Asian American Pacific Islander Association.

## GOVERNING DOCUMENTS

The Vineyard USA Bylaws and Trademark License are the two key documents that serve as the foundations of the governance relationship between Vineyard USA and Vineyard churches. In addition, Vineyard USA also has an employee manual that applies to all Vineyard USA employees.

### A. VINEYARD USA BYLAWS HISTORY AND EVOLUTION

According to a Vineyard historian, the original Vineyard bylaws were drafted in 1985. Because John Wimber had come from a prior church structure that was "elder-led"<sup>33</sup> where the board was very controlling of the pastor, he drafted the original bylaws to give local church pastors heavy-handed independence and authority over their church. Between 1985 and 1988 there were several revisions to the bylaws. Most notably and relevant to our assessment were the proposed revisions of the bylaws made by John Wimber and Sam Thompson<sup>34</sup> in the late eighties. Thompson drafted a provisional constitution and bylaws, and the plan was to have the constitution and bylaws be in effect for a two-year trial period, and then at the end of two years, the AVC could decide whether to continue with these governing documents. These revisions attempted to add provisions to standardize pastoral Ordination, Licensure, Discipline, and Regional Action. The proposed bylaws provided for a Credentials Committee<sup>35</sup> and a process for pastoral ordination and licensure. The section on ordination and licensure laid out qualifications for each as well as procedures for obtaining ministerial credentials and for revocation of such credentials. In addition, these proposed revisions provided for a pastoral disciplinary process. During the time Thompson was drafting the bylaws proposal, Wimber was being influenced by Mike Bickle and the Kansas City Prophets movement.<sup>36</sup> Simultaneously, leaders of

---

<sup>32</sup> <https://vineyardusa.org/financial-well-being-of-pastors-initiative/>

<sup>33</sup> In Christianity, an elder is a person who is valued for wisdom and holds a position of authority.

<sup>34</sup> According to Vineyard history, Thompson was a close friend and ministry colleague of John Wimber. Thompson led the Vineyard Yorba Linda. In 1987, Wimber asked Thompson to take over senior leadership at Vineyard Anaheim because of Wimber's commitments across the movement. Wimber later took back his leadership role at Vineyard Anaheim.

<sup>35</sup> The Credentials Committee was to have authority to issue certificates of ordination to approved ministers who have local and regional endorsement, as well as revocation of credentials if necessary. 1988 – 1990 Provisional Constitution and Bylaws.

<sup>36</sup> Mike Bickle was a pastor and evangelist who later founded the International House of Prayer. Kansas City Prophets shaped the Apostolic-Prophetic Movement and believed that there was a need to restore the ministries of prophets and apostles to the church. This Charismatic movement embraced manifestations of signs and wonders.

the Kansas City Prophets movement convinced Wimber that he had heard from God that Sam Thompson was attempting to take over the Vineyard movement. At the 1988 pastors' conference, the provisional constitution and bylaws were presented to the AVC. However, on the last day of the conference, Wimber ultimately announced that the Lord had spoken through the prophets and that the AVC should not adopt this constitution and bylaws. Thus, the revisions were not adopted.

Around 1992, Wimber apologized for some of the things he had done in the name of hearing from God, under the influence of the prophetic and charismatic leaders, and began to speak more about the need to put a structure in place for AVC while still holding to the importance of local church autonomy. According to one Vineyard leader who worked closely with Wimber in the early years of the movement, Wimber wanted to be like "Wesley not Whitefield," meaning that Wimber wanted to have an organized structure as Wesley had formed to develop accountability, discipleship, and religious teaching, rather than Whitfield who focused on evangelism and revivals.<sup>37</sup> This leader believed that the ReOrg shifted the movement to what Wimber meant it to be – "organized."

Later in 1997, as Wimber's health was declining, there was another attempt to revise the bylaws. At the Board and Counsel meeting in May 1997, the proposed revisions on ordination, licensure, and discipline were again included for consideration, but not adopted.

In 2001, the national office and the AVC incorporation were moved to Texas. The bylaws were revised to include a change of venue for the principal office. The membership of the corporation was revised and stated that it was open to "any pastor and church body who acknowledge and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who is willing to subscribe to the policies of the corporation, who is committed to the priorities and values and who is approved by the Board of Directors..."<sup>38</sup> The phrase "committed to the priorities and values" seems to have been added at this time. The bylaws were revised to include additional duties and responsibilities for the National Director, regional overseers, and area pastoral coordinators. The 2001 revisions to the bylaws included that the rites of ordination and licensure of ministers resided with the local church.<sup>39</sup>

The 2001 bylaws also included sections on Consent of Members and Discipline of Members. The Consent of Members section provided that "any church which is a member of the Association of Vineyard Churches shall be subject to the President/National Director and the Board of Directors, and consents to be bound by the provisions of these bylaws and policies as set forth by the President/National Director or Board of Directors."<sup>40</sup> The Discipline of Members follows this section and states, "All disciplinary actions are considered to be ecclesiastical matters and under these Bylaws in keeping with spiritual mandates of righteous living

---

<sup>37</sup> <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/wesley-vs-whitefield>

<sup>38</sup> Bylaws of Association of Vineyard Churches – revised April 2001. Prior to this revision it appears that membership was open to "any pastor and church body who acknowledge and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who is willing to subscribe to the policies of this corporation, and who is approved by the board of directors."

<sup>39</sup> Bylaws of Association of Vineyard Churches- Article XII – revised April 2001.

<sup>40</sup> Bylaws of Association of Vineyard Churches - Article XIII Section 4

and conduct according to the Christian Bible. Due process shall be provided to any member to be heard by the President/National Director and/or a special Disciplinary Board..."<sup>41</sup>

In 2012, revised Vineyard USA Bylaws were adopted and included an expanded explanation of membership: "open to any pastor and church body... who is willing to subscribe to ... Vineyard theological and philosophical statements, to the Trade Name and Trademark License Agreement..."<sup>42</sup> This revision to the bylaws also included the following: (1) a termination provision for associate members (pastors) when that individual ceases to be a pastor of a recognized Vineyard USA church; (2) a new section on "Task Forces;" (3) added duties and nomination process for the National Director; and (4) selection process and added duties for regional overseers. In this revision, ordination remained with the local Vineyard church. Finally, the 2012 bylaws included revisions to the Consent of Members and Discipline of Members sections. The phrase "to the degree to which they are applicable, recognizing the autonomous nature of the local church" was added to the Consent of Members section. The Discipline of Members section was shortened and the second paragraph containing due process language was removed.

In 2018 there were additional changes to the bylaws that were adopted which included a change to the membership section stating that membership was open to any church body through the pastor. The "Task Forces" section was changed to "National Ministries and Initiatives" and the title of "Regional Overseers" was changed to "Regional Leaders."

The 2020 bylaw revision removed the Financial Team, and made other changes related to making the document internally consistent with the removal of the Financial Team. Over the years, many of the revisions to the bylaws consisted of adding language *in reaction to* a recent challenge or concern. At different times in Vineyard USA history, the board was made up of different representatives. At those relevant times, the members of the board would have input on the bylaws. However, Vineyard USA organizational leadership did not gather input from anyone outside these governing bodies such as local churches, Area Leaders, and at times Regional Leaders, and/or others involved with the Vineyard entities (depending on board makeup at the time) when revising the bylaws and determining how Vineyard USA would govern in a transparent and healthy way.

In 2022, as part of the ReOrg, the bylaws were completely revised, and Vineyard USA adopted new bylaws which included a Preamble. The Preamble opens with a Statement of Purpose which refers to Vineyard USA as the "convening entity for all Vineyard churches in the United States which have been, are, or will be recognized by Vineyard USA as Vineyard churches, and to provide those churches with leadership, resources, and other reasonable and necessary services as required." The Preamble also includes a Statement of Faith which the corporation in its sole discretion "may change from time to time." In addition to the standard sections on members, meetings, officers, voting, and meetings, the new bylaws also include the following

---

<sup>41</sup> Bylaws of Association of Vineyard Churches – Article XIII, Section 5 – revised April 2001.

<sup>42</sup> Amended and Restated Bylaws of Vineyard USA – February 28, 2012.



components:

- The corporation shall no longer have members.
- The corporation is now governed by a Board of Trustees with term limits and committees.
- The bylaws note that a Vineyard USA Leadership Handbook will govern certain matters.<sup>43</sup>
- The bylaws also include a section on Licensure and Rite of Ordination which allows the Board of Trustees to “adopt procedures and requirements for the licensure and/or ordination of ministers.”<sup>44</sup>

The 2022 bylaws are currently in use by Vineyard USA but only apply to Vineyard USA and not to local Vineyard churches. Other than the Preamble referring to Vineyard USA as a convening entity for all Vineyard churches and stating their purpose of providing leadership, resources, and other services, there is no other language in the 2022 bylaws that describe further connection or governing authority over local churches.

## B. TRADEMARK LICENSE

Trademarks and Trademark Licenses are commonly used in the corporate space, but they can also be used in the ministry space for similar reasons. A trademark allows for the licensor of the mark, in this case Vineyard USA, to exercise control over its brand and the quality of deliverables and services offered under that trademark. In addition, a Trademark License allows the organization to protect and maintain its reputation/goodwill, so that the public who have come to know of a certain brand can rely on it. In the corporate space, licensing the use of a trademark often allows for inspection of certain records, facilities, and usage to ensure that there is some quality control for the offerings that are being provided under the trademark.

The Vineyard USA Trademark License grants local churches who wish to associate with Vineyard USA the non-exclusive, limited right and license to use the Vineyard USA trademarks (“Vineyard,” “V” logo, and “La Vina”) in connection with the church operations and related activities including services, conferences, recordings, and printed materials. In practice, the Trademark License is signed by the senior pastor when the church joins Vineyard USA either by a church plant or a church adoption. Additionally, if a new senior pastor is hired by an existing Vineyard church, the practice is that he agrees to and must sign the Trademark License. As of 2016, the only consideration listed for the right to use the trademark is that the local church is required to pay Vineyard USA 3% of its monthly tithe and donations and agrees to support the Vineyard Statement of Faith. The Trademark License states that the “Licensee is and shall be considered an independent contractor with entire control and direction of its operations, subject only to conditions and obligations established by this license.”

The Trademark License allows Vineyard USA to have control of its brand and goodwill of the organization.

---

<sup>43</sup> We reviewed this Draft Handbook – Version 1 as a part of our assessment. It is still under development, but it appears to be at the beginnings of a leadership policy and process manual for Vineyard USA to supplement the bylaws and give guidance to local churches on various topics of church governance and operations.

<sup>44</sup> Statement of Purpose, Statement of Faith, and Bylaws of Vineyard USA – effective January 1, 2022

It also provides Vineyard USA the ability to set some quality control provisions that protect and maintain the Vineyard identity. It allows local churches to be associated to the national association, use the Vineyard name, and advertise itself as part of the Vineyard movement in the United States. Additionally, the Trademark License allows individuals seeking to be part of the Vineyard movement to rely on the Vineyard name for what to expect in that local church body.

While the Trademark License does recognize the independence of the local church, it creates accountability for the local church as well. The Trademark License can be terminated in the following three ways: (1) by 60 days written notice by either party; (2) immediately if licensee does one of the following: (a) ceases to affiliate; (b) "conducts itself and/or hold[s] itself out as having a position inconsistent with Vineyard USA's 'core values,' 'statement of faith,' and any other formal or informal theological or ecclesiastical position taken by the Licensor;" (c) violates the terms; or (d) fails to pay the 3% license fee. Vineyard USA could and has terminated the use of the license in limited cases where churches have violated the terms of the Trademark License including, failing to meet the financial obligation, or acting inconsistently with the Vineyard Statement of Faith, core values, or other formal or informal ecclesiastical positions, among other terms. Since 2016, it is estimated that 1 to 2 churches per year have been disassociated for violating the Trademark License. The termination of the Trademark License has been referred to as the "nuclear option" and is viewed as a last resort when there is an impasse.

## C. EMPLOYEE MANUAL

The *Vineyard USA Employee Manual* provides employees with details about employer values, policies, procedures, and benefits. We reviewed both the 2018 and 2023 *Vineyard USA Employee Manuals*, ("Manual"). The 2023 *Manual* was drafted and enacted in February 2023 during our engagement and for the purposes of this report is the one substantive and formal guide relative to employee obligations and expectations. The *Manual* provides a variety of basic employer and employee-related information including topics of compensation, benefits, work standards and employee discipline. New employees are required to review and sign their acceptance of the *Manual* during the onboarding process. This acceptance includes agreeing to adhere to the Vineyard Core Values and Beliefs and the Mandatory Christian Dispute Resolution Agreement.<sup>45</sup> The *Manual* applies specifically to employees of Vineyard USA, Vineyard Services Group, Vineyard Resources, Vineyard Worship, Vineyard Missions, and Multiply Vineyard. It does not apply to any specific church or individual employed by any one Vineyard church.

# ANALYSIS OF CURRENT VINEYARD STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

## A. RESPONSE TO ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

---

<sup>45</sup> *Vineyard Core Values and Beliefs-RGB*.

As part of our assessment, we spoke to church board members, pastors, Vineyard USA staff, former Vineyard staff and Vineyard USA Trustees. Based on information gathered during the interviews, Guidepost concluded that there were inconsistent and unsustainable organizational structures within the overarching Vineyard movement in the United States.

Interviewees expressed pros and cons for having more structure and accountability to complement the relational culture of the Vineyard movement in the United States. To some, there was a fear that relational dependency would undermine the DNA of the movement – diminishing its rich history of church autonomy and dependance on the Holy Spirit's leading that allowed local ministries to flourish through their creative freedoms. Some expressed skepticism that Vineyard USA would be able to equip and support local churches more, given their lack of engagement in the past. Still others felt that the movement was at a crossroads, and its current structure and culture of autonomy limited sustainability and any future growth. As noted above, the National Team staff have all served as pastors, and many continue regular service in their local Vineyard churches. This was viewed as a strength. Nevertheless, some churches voiced concerns about the National Team staff increase from what the movement had historically. There have been concerns that the National Team would become more involved in governing churches especially if local pastors would be asked to report local church issues to the national level.

Interviews also reflected potential positive outcomes of a stronger governance structure balanced by the relational culture of Vineyard. Some expressed that a clear governance and accountability structure would bring more transparency across the movement, allowing churches and pastors to have greater trust in Vineyard USA. Some thought governance would help smaller churches with less resources to be better supported by Vineyard USA for the long-term growth of the church. Many favored more resources available to local churches and pastors, including training and support when they are faced with crises. Additional resources would also help provide more accountability to pastors and churches for long-term health and sustainability. Others expressed that the younger generation of new pastors preferred a more collaborative team effort in ministry, especially in the event of burnout as a result of mental, emotional, and spiritual stresses of ministry.

## **B. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

From the beginning, we found the Vineyard movement in the United States to be almost solely reliant on a relational culture with generally shared values and theology, which was supported in every way during our assessment. Many interviewees shared their feelings that they “found their people” at their church and the “Vineyard felt like family.” This gave them a sense of belonging and desire to plant Vineyard churches and commit to the values and practices of the movement. While good relationships are the very core and a great strength of the Vineyard movement, its lack of almost any prescriptive structure, policies, procedures, governance, or consistency places the entire movement, including individual churches, Vineyard USA, and its affiliated ministries at risk for issues which can shake the trust of the church community.

In the case studies we reviewed, the lack of defined standards and governance structure led to inconsistencies in how Vineyard USA handled internal issues within Vineyard USA as well as various issues with local churches. Over the years, this has brought more confusion into the Vineyard community's perception of Vineyard USA's roles and responsibilities in relation to local churches. We use insights from these case studies along with results from our interviews within our analysis.

As a result of our work, we identified three primary and substantive areas for findings which speak to the structural challenges. Specifically, we found that the Vineyard movement in the United States<sup>46</sup> had:

1. Minimal structure or formal connection of Vineyard USA to local Vineyard churches and pastors
2. No documented reporting mechanism or response processes for allegations or concerns of misconduct across the Vineyard movement; and
3. Lack of meaningful standards, guidance, or accountability for Vineyard USA staff.

For each of our findings, we provide our analysis and examples below:

#### **1. Minimal Structure or Formal Connection of Vineyard USA to Local Vineyard Churches and Pastors**

The Vineyard movement in the United States was designed to have locally governed churches knitted together through relationships. The founders and the movement itself have gone back and forth on its position relative to the extent of the autonomy of local churches and the role of the national organization. Now with the church at large under such scrutiny, having such disparate and inconsistent operational and accountability structures exposes the movement and its mission to greater risk. The lack of structure and minimal formal connections make it difficult for Vineyard USA to set standards, provide oversight, and allocate resources to Vineyard churches and leaders across the movement.

##### **a. Minimal Formal Connections Between Vineyard USA and Local Vineyard Churches**

In our assessment, we found two points of formal connection between Vineyard USA and local Vineyard churches, pastors, and leaders – Vineyard USA Bylaws and the Trademark License.

#### **Vineyard USA Bylaws**

Bylaws function as a framework for an organization's existence and how it will govern itself. Bylaws should define and detail the following topics: members, meetings, board organization and officers, process for meetings, voting, amendment process, conflict of interest, standing committees, and any other topic that is necessary for the governance process. The 2022 revision of Vineyard USA bylaws addresses the necessary categories for governance. Within the preamble and bylaws, Vineyard USA is asserting their ability to

---

<sup>46</sup> Individual churches have their own organizational structures, and some have their own policies and procedures.

recognize churches as Vineyard churches and setting an expectation for the relationship that Vineyard USA will have with Vineyard churches. The 2022 bylaws state that Vineyard USA will provide leadership, resources, and other services to the churches it recognizes as Vineyard churches. In addition, Vineyard USA has empowered its Board of Trustees to set ordination/licensure requirements and processes in the future. While these are not all that is needed for accountability, they create a path for Vineyard USA to set and approve standards through a Statement of Faith, the ability to recognize churches as a Vineyard church, and the ability to define ordination/licensure requirements for Vineyard pastors.

### **Vineyard USA Trademark License**

As we noted earlier, Vineyard USA utilizes a Trademark License<sup>47</sup> with local churches as the formal legal connection that binds a local Vineyard church to Vineyard USA. During our assessment, we learned about the Trademark License process and how it was addressed in situations of new church plants, adoption of churches, and transitions involving senior pastors. To be recognized as a Vineyard church and use the name and logo, the senior pastor of the church must agree to and sign the Trademark License. By executing the License, the church is agreeing to the provisions therein including the 3% license fee and the Statement of Faith. However, in our interviews we found that the oversight and accountability for the Trademark License could be enhanced. In our interviews, we learned that Vineyard USA does not receive any gross receipt statements or confirmations from local churches to verify that they are remitting 3% of the church's annual giving to Vineyard USA. Instead, Vineyard USA relies on an honor system and a formula to estimate what a church's annual giving may be to determine what the church should be contributing to Vineyard USA. In fact, Vineyard USA only began asking churches to provide their estimated incomes in the 2021 census, though there are records of census administration since the early 1980s. Also in our interviews, we were told that the payment of the 3% license fee varies across churches with some contributing more than 3%, some contributing less than 3% due to budgetary constraints, and then still some contributing less than 3% though Vineyard USA presumes they can give 3%. Currently, there is no mechanism in place for Vineyard USA to adequately determine if a church is complying with this aspect of the Trademark License. We also found that in discussions of the Trademark License, church board members and other church leaders lacked clarity and understanding as to the church's obligations under the Trademark License.

In a limited number of cases, Vineyard USA has "disassociated" churches through termination based on the terms of the Trademark License. One individual we spoke to told us that one or two churches have been dissociated annually since 2016. Most disassociations have been related to ecclesiastical matters contrary to the Vineyard Statement of Faith, with a few being related to the failure to pay the 3% license fees. According to the interview, about 75 – 85% of churches pay the true 3% license fee based on the information the churches provide in their annual census.

---

<sup>47</sup> A trademark is a name, symbol, logo, or design that identifies your organization.

The Trademark License provides termination provisions that allow Vineyard USA to terminate the Trademark License. One provision allows for termination if a Licensee “conducts itself and/or holds itself out as having a position inconsistent with Vineyard USA’s ‘core values,’ ‘statement of faith,’ and any other formal or informal theological or ecclesiastical position taken by Licensor.” While core values and Statement of Faith are stated on the Vineyard USA website and in a 2016 publication,<sup>48</sup> the remainder of that provision for “any other formal or informal theological or ecclesiastical position taken” lacks specificity. In addition, there is no set standard for how that will be evaluated. Use of the Vineyard name and logos does not require pastor and church participation in the movement at large, which is necessary to fostering positive relationships with other Vineyard leaders and churches. There is no requirement to actively engage with the Area and Regional Leaders nor does it require standards for bylaws, conduct, or policies.

While the Trademark License has existed for years as the sole binding agreement between churches and Vineyard USA, we find its current use to be insufficient to meet the demands facing the movement today. While the limited use of the Trademark License as an accountability measure may be attractive for Vineyard USA to avoid liability or other legal distinctions, it is not doing what it is intended to do – protecting the brand of Vineyard USA to effectively provide continuity and accountability across the movement. In addition, if Vineyard USA intends to resource and support churches in a meaningful way, it will need to be consistent in its collection of the 3% license fee to provide that support.

#### **b. Lack of Enumerated Standards, Policies and Process that Define Vineyard’s Distinctives**

Currently, we see the Trademark License as the Vehicle that Vineyard USA uses for membership or association in the Vineyard movement. While the Trademark License provides the connection and “membership” status, we note weaknesses in the following areas due to lack of enumerated standards, policy, and process:

- i. Standards, Accountability and Guidance for Vineyard Pastors
- ii. Standards, Accountability, Guidance, and Support for Vineyard Churches
- iii. Standards, Accountability, Guidance for Area, and Regional Leaders

#### **i. Lack of Standards, Accountability, and Guidance for Vineyard Pastors**

A senior pastor in a Vineyard church is a frontline representative of the Vineyard movement in the United States. However, across the movement there is not consistency or clarity as to what it means to be a Vineyard pastor. In our assessment, we note the following areas of concerns related to the senior pastor role:

##### **Basic vetting of senior pastors**

According to Multiply Vineyard, new pastors coming in to plant a Vineyard church are subject to the church

---

<sup>48</sup> *Vineyard Core Values and Beliefs-RGB*.

planting processes including vetting and background checks prior to being allowed to start a new Vineyard church.

Basic vetting and background checks can at the very least ensure that no current or newly ordained pastor has a criminal history or other significant issues. Additionally, Vineyard USA should have prior knowledge of ordination candidates to determine if there is any existing information at the national level which would preclude the candidate from being in ministry. Currently, the National Team has no authority to enforce basic vetting and background checks, which can potentially expose a local church to liability and scrutiny, such as in the case that a pastor has a prior criminal conviction. In 2019, Vineyard USA decided all Executive Team, Regional Leaders and Area Leaders must have background checks. This new process took almost 18 months as some leaders did not make this check a priority. In one example, an Area Leader refused to submit to the background check and Vineyard USA did not have the authority to enforce the requirement.

### **No Vineyard-wide ordination standards or credentialling of senior pastors**

Many denominations and movements have a process for ordaining and credentialing a minister as a display of affirming God's call upon the pastor's life of ministry, approving the person for ministry after verifying that they meet the qualifications under the standards of the denomination/movement, and providing a type of formal recognition as a minister within the denomination or movement.

Historically in the Vineyard movement in the United States, the only two requirements for someone to start a church plant was to have a "sending church"<sup>49</sup> and to get approval of the Area Leader/Regional Leader. In none of the church bylaws did we see requirements of pastoral vetting other than spiritual vetting on the part of the pastoral candidate. Vineyard culture has supported pastoral candidates with strong ministry credentials over requiring educational credentials. In fact, Wimber himself was well known for saying "Everyone gets to play."<sup>50</sup> He wanted ordinary people from all walks of life and education to feel equipped to be in ministry. This built a culture of Vineyard pastors focused on ministry results and not necessarily on traditional seminary training.

While the prioritization of ministry over academia can be appropriate, having certain baseline requirements in place across the movement better protects the Vineyard, including church members and individual churches. With a lack of overarching basic requirements, individuals may enter ministry and be ordained without fully disclosing relevant information about their qualifications for the role.

In the current Vineyard system, a local church is the ordaining body of the Vineyard movement and Vineyard USA may be notified of the ordination after the fact. Each church determines their ordination standards. Vineyard pastors are not ordained by the national organization and therefore are not accountable to Vineyard USA. Within the church bylaws we reviewed, churches ordained, licensed, and/or commissioned pastors

---

<sup>49</sup> A church that sends out missionaries and/or church planters to begin a church or ministry.

<sup>50</sup> <https://vineyardusa.org/about/john-wimber/>

within their own entities. The local church boards accepted and reviewed nominations for pastoral ordination and a few of the churches we looked at had defined processes for approval of ordinations as well as terminations of pastors. Thus, we did not find a uniform standard across the movement as to what it means to be ordained as a Vineyard pastor.

Vineyard USA can and should be able to assist local churches by supporting these ordinations with consistent standards and well-communicated expectations. Our review of Vineyard USA bylaws shows multiple attempts to amend the bylaws to include standardized ordination and disciplinary process for the movement, but those amendments were never approved. However, as stated earlier in this report, we do note in the latest 2022 revision, Vineyard USA has empowered its Board of Trustees to set and approve ordination/licensure requirements and processes in the future.

### **Lack of accountability and oversight of local senior pastors**

The current structure gives the local church oversight of the pastor, and the local church board is responsible for any discipline or termination if warranted. In instances of pastoral misconduct, the church must act but at times is limited in its authority over the senior pastor. If Vineyard USA was a partner to the credentialing and ordination approval, it would also give them a voice and a responsibility in seeing that any allegation of pastoral misconduct is handled appropriately. For now, the local churches bear this weight alone.

In addition to movement-wide inconsistent standards for ordination, there is a wide variety of philosophies and practices around pastoral discipline and/or termination. In a few of the church bylaws we reviewed, they had mechanisms built in for such issues. Some churches had mechanisms in place for board/council and congregational votes in the event pastoral termination was required. One local church bylaw required  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the church council and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the leadership team voting to terminate.

We heard repeatedly that the role of the senior pastor lacked significant oversight by boards in many cases because the board members were specifically chosen by the senior pastor. We saw in some of the case studies we reviewed that the board prioritized support of the senior pastor over protecting the local church and its members when pastoral conduct issues arose. This sometimes may have clouded the local board's judgment when making decisions about disciplining or terminating the pastor when there was a significant issue of pastoral misconduct.

Once ordained as a pastor within the Vineyard movement in the United States, there is no consistent pastoral accountability. With constant changes in social norms and a current culture that is more attentive to issues of abuse and misconduct, it is critical for the Vineyard to have clearly defined standards and unifying values for its pastors. These standards and values can be defined in the Statement of Faith, a Code of Conduct and/or some sort of Operational Handbook. A Code of Conduct allows for clarity as to what constitutes a character and behavior worthy of a Vineyard pastor. It can set standards and expectations of pastors as they encounter various challenges both in their personal and ministerial life. The Code can also be a tool by



which local church boards, Area and Regional Leaders, and Vineyard USA can hold pastors accountable. Specific issues which can be documented within a pastor Code of Conduct include but are not limited to personal behavior (speech, interpersonal relationships, and temperance); issues of faithfulness (responsibilities to God, family, congregation, community, peers); integrity (plagiarism, honesty on the pulpit); stewardship (financial dealings, accepting gifts, transparency); character (confidentiality, relational issues); and accountability. A Code of Conduct can provide documented and clear expectations so in the event disciplinary action is required, a source can be referenced.

The lack of consistent accountability of pastors places the Vineyard movement in the United States and individual churches at risk. This can lead to an unequal handling of matters when an issue is identified. It can also lead to a disconnect between the pastors and Area and Regional Leaders as well as local church boards.

A consistent Vineyard Code of Conduct could make clear to the greater Vineyard community what they can expect from pastors. If a pastor is not acting consistent with the Vineyard Statement of Faith, the Code of Conduct can be used to recognize the behavior and take action to remediate it. Vineyard USA through its standards and joint ordination process should be able to hold local church pastors accountable to the Code of Conduct and not solely rely on local church boards to act.

Across multiple interviews, we heard frustration due to lack of accountability for senior pastors. As previously described on Page 12, a former Vineyard pastor said that he had desired more accountability for himself outside of his local board, who he was close to and had served with for many years. As a result, the pastor asked the board to add into the church bylaws that if the pastor ever became entangled in an issue that affected the church that the board would get the national office involved.

The Vineyard community expects Vineyard USA to hold pastors accountable and act when an issue surfaces. It has a responsibility to provide pastoral oversight and accountability, to care for leaders when redirection or rehabilitation is needed, and to protect Vineyard congregants from consequences of theological, ecclesiological, and moral abuse. As Wimber said "Pastors left un-pastored often do things according to the dictates of their hearts, and sometimes those dictates aren't too healthy."<sup>51</sup>

## **ii. Lack of Standards, Accountability, Guidance, and Support for Vineyard Churches**

As discussed earlier in our report, the Preamble to the Vineyard USA Bylaws positions Vineyard USA as the convening entity for all Vineyard churches in the United States and it tasks itself with providing leadership, resources, and services for local Vineyard churches. In our review, we found standards that were referenced such as Statement of Faith, core values, and the 3% license fee for use of Trademark, but we did not find any standards or policy as to the details or expectations about how these things would be measured and/or how the relationship between Vineyard USA and local churches would operate. Specifically, there were no

---

<sup>51</sup> Wimber, J., "Steering a Course Between Chaos and Traditional Denominationalism," in *John Wimber's Pastoral Letters*, ed. and compiled by Derek Morphew (South Africa: Vineyard International Publishing, 2019), Oct./Nov. 1993 Volume 1, Issue 4, Kindle, 55.

detailed standards for what it means to be affiliated with Vineyard USA and no details of how Vineyard USA would carry out its task of providing leadership, resources, and services to the local Vineyard church.

### **No standards for determining if a church is “In Good Standing”**

Vineyard USA lacks standards to determine if a church is “in good standing” within the movement. In current practice, a church in “good standing” is simply agreeing to comply with the requirements of the Trademark License. A more robust definition of “good standing” for churches would be much like the Code of Conduct for pastors. It would provide clarity for churches as to their expectations and requirements to be affiliated with the Vineyard movement in the United States. There should be clarity in what a Vineyard church should “be, know, and do.” This may involve the church agreeing to having certain basics in place including a Statement of Faith, standards for ordination, sound board governance, reporting requirements as to significant matters, policies and procedures, and a commitment to participation in the Vineyard movement through Area and Regional trainings, national conferences, and the annual census.

Vineyard USA also lacks a mechanism for determining if local churches follow the provisions of the Trademark License. Vineyard USA relies on reporting by Area and Regional Leaders and church honesty as to payment of the license fee, and they accept that certain churches cannot pay the 3% while others may pay more. As to the Church’s alignment with the Statement of Faith, Vineyard USA also relies on the Area and Regional Leaders and word of mouth as to whether a church is theologically consistent with the Vineyard movement.

### **Lack of church support and resourcing**

As stated in the Preamble to the Vineyard USA Bylaws and in interviews with Vineyard USA staff, we heard a desire to resource and support the local churches. Vineyard USA does make available through its website, a long list of spiritual and theological resources. It also provides podcasts on a variety of topics including leadership and conflict resolution. In 2022, Vineyard USA conducted a survey of local church pastors to gather data concerning church and pastoral health. The survey results gave insight into the pastor and church needs regarding board relations within churches and handling personal and church crises. The survey results allowed Vineyard USA to secure a \$1 million grant to support financial health and education for Vineyard pastors.

In our review of resources and support, we found little in the way of documented and consistent methods of operations, ways to address conflict, and standards and expectations for church governance. In our assessment, we note two key areas where churches needed support but the actual resourcing by Vineyard USA in those areas was lacking – church governance and crisis resources.

### **Lack of guidance for healthy church governance**

Vineyard USA has not played a significant role or provided consistent expectations of governance models across churches. Vineyard churches are primarily pastor led with some influence and oversight by board

members depending on the specific church bylaws. In many cases, board members are hand selected by pastors. The roles of board members vary as do their qualifications and board composition. In smaller churches, board members may include members from the church community whose sole qualification is spiritual. While spiritual qualifications are a critical component, professional qualifications and training would be beneficial to church board members.

In our review, we found that Vineyard USA does not provide consistent church board by-law models or church board best practices to lead churches to healthy governance. Each church is governed by their own set of bylaws and subject to their state law requirements for bylaws. Local churches have independent control not only of their bylaws, but also of their governing structures, pastoral selection, properties, and even theological beliefs that are in addition to the standard Vineyard USA Statement of Faith that the church affirmed.

In our interviews, we heard from pastors who desired resources and support in setting up governance and structure within their own churches. One former church planter described the process of starting a church plant as a “big feat” and very isolating. Other former church planters recalled being handed a check from Multiply Vineyard of \$3000, and then the church was on its own from that point on to establish its own bylaws and a board. Many planters were bi-vocational and held jobs outside of the church to make ends meet. As a result, they did not have the experience or capacity to establish robust bylaws. According to one church planter, Vineyard USA launched churches, hoping, and praying that the church would make it, but not always understanding or knowing their ongoing needs.

Though Vineyard USA does not have a model or mandated components to church bylaws,<sup>52</sup> we heard that relationally connected churches simply shared their bylaws with each other to use as references. As part of our assessment, we reviewed five different sets of church bylaws. We acquired a few examples of board bylaws from Vineyard USA, and others were provided by individuals during our interviews. We found similarities among the bylaws such as categories and definition of members and board purpose. In the bylaws we reviewed, each board served under the leadership of the senior pastor and had varying terms of service. The boards primarily served in a fiduciary role while the senior pastor made all ecclesiastical decisions regarding church beliefs, direction, and day-to-day operation of the church. This unilateral authority of the pastor as to direction and ecclesiastical decisions could be problematic if a senior pastor desired to radically alter the direction or the foundational theological beliefs of the church. In some governance models, the senior pastor has unilateral authority to remove a church from the Vineyard movement in the United States or alter the makeup of the church board without any input from other congregational leaders, members, or Vineyard USA. As we have said earlier in this report, the culture has allowed Vineyard churches to grow and expand on their own sometimes resulting in the senior pastor having unchecked authority, with the church board having limited oversight or with a board that is hand-picked by

---

<sup>52</sup> Multiply Vineyard does provide new church plants with a sample Articles of Incorporation. The language is basic and limited to the church's purpose but does not have any language outlining a governance or structure connecting the church to Vineyard USA.

the senior pastor. This opens the local church to risk in the event there is an overbearing senior pastor who chooses to make decisions inconsistent with the bylaws, board, or the congregation.

In our interviews, we found a lack of understanding from church members and some leaders as to how their church board operated. The National Team members indicated that they were not sure if every church had bylaws that met legal standards. There has not been an effort on the national level to collect and review bylaws of Vineyard churches to date. In addition, Vineyard USA had little visibility into local church board composition and in fact when we sought the names and titles of church board members, Vineyard USA did not have the information.<sup>53</sup> Vineyard USA also has no current resources to help local churches identify qualified board members or to provide appropriate training for board members to successfully navigate their roles. While there may be a few churches who have a process for identifying qualified candidates for board positions, we saw nothing relative to vetting or required qualifications in the church bylaws we reviewed. As for training, there may be some ad hoc training provided in specific churches as to board responsibilities, but again we were unaware of any consistent training provided to church boards.

### **Inability for Vineyard USA to provide resources for churches or individuals in crisis**

In our interviews and case study reviews, we found that Vineyard USA lacked the ability to provide consistent support and resources for churches and individuals in crisis situations. Historically and presently, Vineyard USA and its churches have faced crises related to abuse and misconduct, substance abuse, marital issues, and financial malfeasance. The needed resources range from pastoral care, counseling, legal resources, investigations, and other guidance. We found that Vineyard USA's response was often related to relational capital and whether the local church had a connection to someone in the national office.

During our assessment, we found that some church pastors and staff wanted more support from Vineyard USA, but at the same time they did not want to be "told" an exact way to do something or be given a list of prescriptive measures or "Dos and Don'ts." Most people we spoke to enjoy the relational aspect of the movement; however, the dependence on relationships meant that some churches and pastors received more support than others. In some instances, well connected church leaders who knew who to call within the national leadership of Vineyard USA had insight into available resources or personally sought guidance as they addressed a sensitive matter within the church. However, a less connected church leader may not have the benefit of that kind of connection, strictly because they lacked significant relationships with people who had access to resources.

In interviews, church pastors and others communicated a number of ways they could be better supported by Vineyard USA when a church faced a crisis such as one involving clergy misconduct, and when staff encountered serious personal issues such as substance abuse, addictions, or marital crisis. Sometimes the

---

<sup>53</sup> Vineyard churches can volunteer the names of board members through the census process. However, the practice is inconsistent and not enforced.

crisis only affected the pastor while others had impact on the larger congregation. Even with the most seasoned boards, these issues would be difficult to navigate. We interviewed individuals involved in some of these cases, including the pastors who were involved in the misconduct or the perceived mishandling of the situations. Some of those interviewed described reactive and sometimes awkward responses on the part of the boards. Some boards lacked an ability to hold the pastor accountable given the limits of their authority under the church bylaws. Some boards felt their role was to protect the pastor even in instances where the pastor should have been disciplined and in some cases, the board was simply ill-equipped to handle complex issues dealing with substance abuse, financial malfeasance, or allegations of sexual misconduct.

We identified the creation of the Super Regional Leader positions on the National Team as a good place for Vineyard USA to better resource churches. Enhancing this position and potentially even expanding the number of SRLs in the future could build a more significant relational and organizational dependence between Vineyard USA and the local churches. It could also serve to assist the volunteer Area and Regional Leaders and the local churches in prevention efforts and healthier crisis response. While this position is relatively new, we found that the SRLs could be better resourced and trained. Resources which may be most helpful to churches through the SRLs could include the following:

- Licensed and vetted counseling services including marriage and individual counselors and trauma informed counselors;
- Vetted investigative resources for use by churches faced with allegations of abuse or misconduct;
- Vetted addiction/recovery providers; and
- Vetted attorneys and law firms who work significantly in non-profit and ministry spaces.

### **iii. Lack of Standards, Accountability, and Guidance for Area and Regional Leaders**

As previously discussed, local Vineyard churches are supported by Area Leaders and Regional Leaders who are not employed by Vineyard USA but rather serve as volunteers to assist Vineyard USA in supporting local churches and pastors. The role of Area and Regional Leaders is to collectively “facilitate the health, community, and cooperation among the Vineyard pastors and churches in their areas and to represent Vineyard USA to the pastors and churches in their areas and regions.”<sup>54</sup> Area Leaders are chosen by Regional Leaders, now with the input of SRLs, and provide support to six to ten local churches in a geographic area. They host meetings with the local area pastors assigned to their care, and provide guidance as needed and requested. Regional Leaders support seven to eight Area Leaders and around 60 churches in a geographic region. The Regional Leaders are chosen by the SRLs, and prior to the ReOrg were chosen by the National Director. Regional Leaders are responsible for hosting regular meetings with Area Leaders, organizing regional conferences, and functioning as a bridge between the National Team and the local churches.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Area and Regional Leaders Best Practice Guide

<sup>55</sup> In March 2023, Vineyard USA held a conference for the National Team leaders, Regional Leaders, and Area Leaders to gather and discuss the

Prior versions of the bylaws defined the process for selection, approval, term, duties, and responsibilities of Regional Leaders. Currently this information is not included in bylaws; however, some of these topics were addressed in recent training and are documented in the Regional and Area Leader's Best Practices Guide. This guide appears to be a training and information document for volunteer leaders, and provides role descriptions, expectations, competencies, and metrics for Area and Regional Leaders as they serve their geographical areas. Another section of the guide generally describes the process for adding an Area Leader which appears to place the decision with the Regional Leader. Another section set forth Area and Regional Rhythms Checklist for engagement and training throughout the year. While this guide provided descriptions, expectations, and general guidance, neither the guide nor any other governing documents provide clear policy standards for vetting, selection, approval, terms, duties, code of conduct, or removal process for these volunteer leaders. As previously discussed, Vineyard USA does now require background checks of Area Leaders and Regional Leaders every five years but has no ability to enforce the requirement.

Over the years, the consistency of the training provided to the roles of Area or Regional Leaders has varied. While this does not diminish the excellent work many Area and Regional Leaders have done, some have struggled in their understanding and execution of these roles or been overwhelmed by the breadth of the tasks in addition to their local church roles. For example, one former Area Leader we spoke to shared that he received informal training from his predecessor, who happened to be a very active Area Leader. While the training was not formal, he observed the behavior of the Area Leader who was more engaged with the local churches and more structured in his outreach with the local pastors, thus learning by example.

However, in another example a former Area Leader planted her first church and then two years later was asked to be an Area Leader. She had not been given specific training and had not observed much from her previous Area Leader to feel comfortable in this position. The messaging she received from her Regional Leader was that her role was solely to support and care for the local church pastor and coach them through situations but without any clear authority.

One of the former national leaders recalled that Vineyard USA would sometimes give a pastor the Regional Leader role because he was the pastor of a thriving and large church. It was hard for a pastor to maintain both their own church and oversee many more churches. Area Leader and Regional Leader roles are voluntary, so it is challenging for these volunteer pastors to help other churches in their crises when they have their own full- time ministries to lead. Therefore, the Area and Regional Leaders were not consistently involved with the churches they oversaw, which continued to cultivate the culture of local church autonomy. Realistically the leaders have not had enough training of their own, or the capacity to train local pastors.

As an example, a former Area Leader shared that when she was a new pastor in a church plant, she did not

---

future of the Vineyard USA and participate in trainings on key topics of the movement. This was the first Vineyard USA formal meeting on a national level, to mobilize, vision cast, and train Regional Leaders and Area Leaders on their roles and responsibilities. The training focused on best practices and resources available to them as they help equip, encourage, and empower local churches.

feel supported by her Area Leader and was not clear on what she was to expect of her Area Leader. Though the Area Leader had been in that position for 15 years, only 5-6 area connection meetings had been held. The pastor did not feel the Area Leader made an effort for consistent connection with the local pastors. This Area Leader was introverted and did not like meetings but was gifted in other ways. This local pastor approached the Regional Leader about the lack of support she felt from the Area Leader, and she eventually took over his position of Area Leader with his blessing. She was gifted in relational ministry and cultivated a different culture and began meeting with the local church pastors more.

## **2. No Documented Reporting Mechanism or Consistent Response Processes for Allegations or Concerns of Misconduct Across the Wider Vineyard Movement in the United States**

One of the most frequent themes we heard through interviews was the lack of consistency across the movement in reporting and handling issues of significance, specifically allegations of misconduct and abuse. While generally those interviewed described an internal mechanism which allowed individuals to share concerns with leaders, there was no general understanding of how issues would be addressed or by whom. There was no mechanism in place which allowed for the confidential reporting of concerns and no movement- wide protocol for the fair handling of matters. Even pastors who were subject to scrutiny told us that when they sought help prior to an issue becoming public, there was no safe place to report their own weaknesses and failings. Additionally, many at Vineyard USA and in local churches confessed that since the movement was so relational, there was a lack of discretion which resulted in the free discussion of personal and church struggles, or on the other extreme, a lack of openness out of fear of speaking out against a respected leader.

When conflicts or issues arose in the past, Vineyard USA would distance itself because of its lack of structural authority and limitations on resources. Instead, Area Leaders, Regional Leaders, or Vineyard USA would direct the concerned parties to the local church to pursue the matter. This led to a lack of clarity about responsibility and authority among concerned parties and caused some reporters to feel there was no safe place to report concerns, especially if the local church pastor was a party to the allegation. Regardless, if Vineyard USA had Legal authority over local churches or not, individuals who had concerns expected Vineyard USA to be able to do something. In the event an issue was mishandled at the local level, there could also be impact across the greater Vineyard movement in the United States.

In some cases, Vineyard USA stepped in and played a more assertive role in communications and even with the initiation of investigations, sometimes without the knowledge or concurrence of the affected church. This response, however, was inconsistent and sometimes depended on the individual affected. In other cases, Vineyard USA discovered a crisis long after the fact resulting in delayed action which as a result brought on allegations of cover up and mishandling.

### **A. March 1, 2023 Initiation of the Reporting Mechanism**

During our engagement Vineyard USA asked Guidepost to create a confidential reporting mechanism as it became evident that Vineyard USA lacked the resources to properly receive and process allegations. The 24/7 hotline email account went live on March 1, 2023. On March 6, 2023, Vineyard USA advised all Regional and Areas Leaders of the hotline at an in-person training in Orlando, Florida. On March 16th, the email account was shared with others via the Vineyard USA website.<sup>56</sup> It serves as a confidential reporting channel for reporters to be able to share reports with Guidepost's trauma-informed response team. With the permission of the Reporter, Guidepost provides underlying information about the allegation to Vineyard USA for consideration and action, without disclosing any of the Reporter's identifying information. At the time of this report, Guidepost has only received five reports to the email account. For the purposes of this report, no specific information is being included.

While there is now a confidential reporting mechanism available, there remains no documented reporting, investigative or resolution process so that people can understand the process. Having a documented process in place which is easily accessible is a key step and holds the organization accountable to consistently applying the same standards to every report of abuse or misconduct. The big challenge with any standardized policy will be its application to local churches. If Vineyard USA approves a comprehensive reporting and investigative process for significant matters, it must also consider supporting the local churches' ability to abide by these terms including funding their efforts.

### **3. Lack of Meaningful Standards, Guidance, or Accountability for Vineyard USA Staff**

As stated earlier in our report, we reviewed the 2018 and 2023 versions of the Vineyard USA *Employee Manuals* ("Manual"). The 2023 *Manual* addresses issues of employee misconduct and discipline. The Discipline policy identifies and describes expectations around job performance, misconduct, harassment, and alcohol, drugs, and controlled substances. The policy also provides for disciplinary action for violations related to these issues. In our review of the 2023 *Employee Manual*, we identified several areas for consideration by Vineyard USA.

#### **A. Lack of clear definitions of misconduct and no Code of Conduct**

The *Employee Manual* addresses misconduct with a list of examples of problem behaviors. There is a separate section addressing "unlawful harassment" and sexual harassment. While the *Manual* provides its own definitions of harassment, it is important to note that workplace harassment is clearly defined by federal and state law. Federal law defines unlawful workplace harassment as those behaviors that violate the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Harassment is unwelcome conduct based on an individual's protected status such as race, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or genetic information. "Harassment becomes unlawful when 1) submission to the conduct is made a condition of continued employment, or 2) the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating,

---

<sup>56</sup> <https://vineyardusa.org/guidepost-assessment/>



hostile, or abusive. Anti-discrimination laws also prohibit harassment against individuals in retaliation for filing a discrimination charge, testifying, or participating in any way in an investigation, proceeding, or lawsuit under these laws; or opposing employment practices that they reasonably believe discriminate against individuals, in violation of these laws.”<sup>57</sup>

The discipline section lists examples of misconduct and does include “use of profanity or language that is abusive or threatening towards others;” however, there are other behaviors that may in the common vernacular be called “harassment” but may not meet the legal definition of workplace harassment under federal and state law such as bullying and inappropriate behaviors that show a pattern of unwelcome conduct such as teasing, threatening, excluding, publicly reprimanding or degrading that may not be directed towards someone or based on protected class status.

The *Manual* also addresses alcohol, drugs, and controlled substances and prohibits being “under the influence” or “impaired” by any of these substances on Vineyard USA property or in Vineyard USA vehicles. These terms are defined as “being unable to perform work in a safe and productive manner, and/or being in a physical or mental condition which creates a risk to the safety and well-being of others and/or Vineyard USA property, and/or exceeding applicable benchmarks.”

While there are some examples throughout the *Manual* of problem behaviors, Vineyard USA does not have a formal Code of Conduct to make clear the standards of conduct they expect of their employees. As previously discussed, Codes of Conduct function to give the affected parties a definitive guide on how they should work and act while holding their position. The Code of Conduct is meant to ensure affected parties act consistently with the organization’s values.

## **B. Lack of clear process for reporting**

The *Manual* addresses reporting in the Discipline section under harassment<sup>58</sup> and later in the General Information section under conflict resolution.<sup>59</sup> In regard to harassment, the *Manual* states, “if you believe that you are being, or have been, harassed in any way, you must report the facts of the incident(s) to your supervisor or the National Director or his/her designee immediately. In determining whether the alleged conduct constitutes unlawful harassment, the totality of the circumstances, such as nature of the conduct and the context in which the alleged incident occurred, will be investigated.”<sup>60</sup> While the policy does require reporting and instructs employees on whom to report to if they are being harassed, the policy does not instruct the employee on how to report nor does it provide any mechanism for an anonymous report. Employees are instructed to report to their supervisor, National Director, or a designee; however, the policy does not name a designee or advise an employee of what to do if the report concerns one of those individuals.

---

<sup>57</sup> [Harassment | U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission \(eeoc.gov\)](https://www.eeoc.gov/harassment)

<sup>58</sup> *Employee Manual*, 2023 at 30.

<sup>59</sup> *Id.* at 34.

<sup>60</sup> *Id.* at 31.

While the *Manual* does address reporting, it does not contain a clear anti-retaliation provision. The Conflict Resolution section does mention that there should be no “reprisal” if a conflict is addressed.

The *Manual* also provides a conflict resolution<sup>61</sup> process and specifically states:

Vineyard USA desires to follow biblically based conflict resolution. Therefore, if you have conflict with a peer you are encouraged to go to that person directly. If the conflict is not resolved, you are then to include a supervisor. If the conflict is still not resolved, you may bring the matter to the attention of the National Director or his/her designee. It is important to follow the appropriate steps and if you have not completed a step the next appeal process will ask you to return to the appropriate person. In case of conflict between a supervisor and supervisee the National Director or his/her designee may be invited into the process. At no time should reprisal take place if a conflict is addressed.<sup>62</sup>

While the encouragement to personally address conflicts with the involved parties is not unusual in faith-based organizations, the lack of additional specific mechanisms can limit the ability of employees to come forward with concerns relative to inappropriate behavior on the part of co-workers or managers. The conflict resolution policy does not recognize the power differences that are present in a work environment, nor does it give specifics on the types of matters that might be appropriate for this path. This approach to conflict resolution may be successful in certain minor conflicts in the workplace, but in other situations it may have the effect of silencing those who are being harmed because of the requirement to face the wrongdoer before going to the next level. Additional reporting and conflict resolution mechanisms are needed for employees to fully understand the options in addressing concerning issues.

The *Manual* also contains Vineyard USA’s Mandatory Christian Dispute Resolution Agreement which employees are required to sign as a new employee. As part of this agreement, VUSA employees agree to the following:

You understand and agree that your employment by Vineyard USA (including, but not limited to, any claim regarding the scope, effect, and/or enforceability of the Employment Manual), is subject to this mandatory Christian dispute resolution agreement, and that you hereby waive your right to file a claim in any other venue, including, but not limited to, civil court and/or before an administrative or regulatory agency (except with respect to enforcement of the arbitrator’s decision).<sup>63</sup>

This mandatory use of Christian Conciliation limits Vineyard USA employees’ recourse through any other mechanism. Use of this type of agreement and/or service can be problematic in employment conflicts related to abuse.

---

<sup>61</sup> In addition to the 2023 Employee Manual, we did review A Structure Process for Disciplining & Restoring Fallen Leaders, 2010 and Hard Conversations Booklet, 2017. While these documents provided relational guidance on how to address conflicts, we did not consider them to provide structured guidance or be firm policies.

<sup>62</sup> *Employee Manual*, 2023 at 34.

<sup>63</sup> *Id.* at 40.

### **C. Lack of clear process for disciplinary or investigative process**

The *Manual* provides for claims of harassment to be investigated; however, it does not provide any policy or process for how investigations will occur. The *Manual* also provides for disciplinary action for a number of violations; however, the process for discipline is very vague and discretionary. The *Manual* provides that:

Generally, Vineyard USA will attempt to be redemptive and progressive (i.e., degree of sternness commensurate with the severity of the transgression) in its discipline. However, Vineyard USA reserves the right to implement any system of discipline that it deems, in its sole subjective discretion, to be appropriate in the circumstances, up to and including immediate termination of employment. All disciplinary actions will be fully documented in the employee's personnel file via personnel memo.<sup>64</sup>

While Vineyard USA desires to address disciplinary issues, the *Manual* lacks defined written procedures with specific steps on who will address or initiate the disciplinary process, how issues will be escalated based on frequency of occurrence or severity, when investigations are appropriate, whether there is an appeal process, or how confidentiality is handled.

### **D. Lack of standards concerning conflicts of interest and the hiring of relatives**

The *Manual* addresses conflicts of interest and recognizes the "obligation to conduct church business within guidelines that prohibit actual or potential conflicts of interest."<sup>65</sup> The *Manual* provides general guidance, but then directs employees to the National Director for clarification. In our assessment, we are not aware of any further guidelines as to the decision-making process for determining a conflict of interest or how Vineyard USA would safeguard against conflicts of interest.

Another area where there can be conflicts of interest is the hiring of relatives. The *Manual* addresses hiring of relatives and provides general guidelines on how to address and minimize the potential problems that may arise. The main guidelines state that "Related employees must not be involved in a supervisory/reporting relationship with one another if possible." Then it goes on to provide guidance for when a supervisory relationship exists among employees that are related. The guidance provided has all decision-making on this issue going through the National Director. However, it does not detail how this will be addressed if the hiring and employment of a relative involves the National Director. While Vineyard USA has been transparent to the significant relational elements of the Vineyard movement, we did observe the risk of potential conflicts of interest relative to the employment and engagement of family members. While not unusual in the greater Vineyard culture, we do see this as an area for concern. We also saw this potential risk repeatedly with examples of the employment of both spouses within a church<sup>66</sup> or on the National Team which could be seen as a conflict. While in well-functioning churches and organizations, these relationships can work, in instances of conflict or discipline, these relationships may not only be impacted personally but

---

<sup>64</sup> *Id.* at 29

<sup>65</sup> *Id.* at 34

<sup>66</sup> In some instances, spouses serve as co-pastors together at local churches and/or serve on church boards who are accountable to the other spouse pastor. We also saw instances where adult children worked within churches of serving parents who were pastors.

may have significant consequences to the greater organization. While our case study relates to a local church rather than Vineyard USA, we believe it is an example of the potential problems that can arise when relatives are employed together.

While we did not conduct a review of the matter, during our engagement, we became aware of an ongoing investigation at a prominent Vineyard church which involved a youth pastor who served with his father as senior pastor and his mother who was part of the National Team. The investigation focused on allegations of inappropriate behavior by the youth pastor and the potential inappropriate response by both the parents in their pastoral positions. Given their familial relationships, it has complicated the investigation and heightened the impact for the church.

### **E. Lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities of Super Regional Leaders**

As mentioned above, three SRLs were hired in 2022 for the Vineyard USA National Team during the ReOrg to oversee more than 500 Vineyard churches. For the first time in the movement's history, there are three dedicated full-time staff positions whose role is to support Area/Regional life. Each SRL oversees three regions, and approximately 175 churches. The SRLs serve as supports to Area and Regional Leaders and are responsible for encouraging local Vineyard leaders through healthy communication, leadership development, and pastoral care. According to the 2023 training provided, SRLs also provide help to Regional Leaders with budgeting regional funds, planning annual regional gatherings, and assist in reconciliation efforts within the region as needed. According to the training, SRLs may also help with disciplinary procedures in partnership with independent teams responsible for investigating allegations.<sup>67</sup> However, it is important to note that Vineyard USA does not have a formally documented disciplinary process. Though the SRLs have been given the critical role of connecting the local Vineyard communities to Vineyard USA, because there are no formal structures these SRLs must rely on relational capital and have no real authority over churches or the volunteer Area or Regional Leaders.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

During our engagement, we became very aware of the cultural impact of more structure and governance. The goal of our recommendations is to achieve meaningful and sustainable reform to Vineyard USA's structure and governance, in a manner that recognizes Vineyard's values and its culture of local church autonomy. In crafting these recommendations, we received valuable input from numerous sources involved with case studies as well as local and national Vineyard churches and operations.

---

<sup>67</sup> AL and RL Best Practice Guide

## **Finding 1: Minimal Structure or Formal Connection of Vineyard USA to Local Vineyard Churches and Pastors**

### **Recommendations**

1(a).	<p><u>Formalize the Relationship between Vineyard USA and Local Vineyard Churches:</u> Vineyard USA should consult counsel and consider a review of the Trademark License to determine its ability to strengthen and/ or enforce the relationship between Vineyard USA and Vineyard churches or develop other alternative solutions for legal documentation of a formal relationship between Vineyard USA and Vineyard churches.</p> <p>Vineyard USA should consider an association/membership structure with clear requirements for membership and for remaining in good standing. This could be accomplished through further enhancement and enforcement of the Trademark license process, as well as a membership process, an operations handbook, and Code of Conduct, as further discussed below. In doing so, Vineyard USA should ensure language used across all governing documents is consistent. (See additional information in 1(g)).</p>
1(b).	<p><u>Vetting:</u> Vineyard USA should establish a process for vetting and require comprehensive background checks of newly onboarded staff, executives, Area and Regional Leaders, and local church senior pastors at least every five years.</p> <p>Vineyard USA should continue screening new church plant pastors.</p> <p>Background checks should include comprehensive criminal checks, reviews of social media, and interviews of personal references.</p> <p>Vineyard staff, executives, Area and Regional Leaders and local church senior pastors should be required to update Vineyard USA of any changes to their background or criminal record history.</p>
1(c).	<p><u>Ordination and Credentialing:</u> Vineyard USA and local Vineyard churches should work together to establish a process for joint ordination/credentialing of pastors within the Vineyard movement in the United States.</p> <p>We recommend that local churches continue to recommend the pastor for ordination, but Vineyard USA establish a national ordination and credentialing procedure. If the prospective pastor of the local church does not meet all the Vineyard USA ordination requirements, then Vineyard USA should notify the local church of any specific information or steps that the pastor must complete in order to meet ordination requirements.</p> <p>Based on the joint ordination, either Vineyard USA or the local church could initiate discipline or termination of the pastor if needed.</p>
1(d).	<p><u>Pastoral Code of Conduct:</u> Working with local Vineyard churches and pastors, Vineyard USA should document a pastoral Code of Conduct that identifies standards expected of all Vineyard pastors around personal and ministerial behavior, integrity, stewardship, character, and accountability.</p>
1(e).	<p><u>Oversight Process:</u> Vineyard USA should document a process to investigate, discipline, and/or terminate a pastor for misconduct.</p>

1(f).	<p><u>Operations Handbook:</u> Vineyard USA should create an operations handbook that connects Vineyard pastors and churches together through a set of standardized operational policies and procedures; requirements and expectations of churches and pastors; and reporting protocols.</p> <p>As part of any senior pastor appointment to a new or existing Vineyard church, the pastor should be required to review and agree to abide by the terms of the Operations Handbook in addition to the Pastoral Code of Conduct.</p>
1(g).	<p><u>Church Good Standing Determinations:</u> Vineyard USA should document “good standing” values and requirements for newly opened and adopted Vineyard Churches in the operational handbook.</p> <p>Vineyard USA may consider setting a timeline to bring existing churches into alignment with the standards.</p> <p>A Good Standing definition could include required pre-onboarding pastor vetting procedures; training on critical topics and specific policies; bylaws consistent with those outlined by Vineyard USA; a statement of faith consistent with Vineyard USA; a code of ethics for leadership and staff; participation in an annual census; and adherence to any financial commitments of churches to Vineyard USA.</p>
1(h).	<p><u>Healthy Church Guidance Toolbox</u></p> <p>Vineyard USA should provide a “Toolbox” to local churches that includes providing guidance, best practice, model protocols and policies on the following topics:</p> <p>Model bylaws which may contain items such as: state guidelines with basic legal language required by each state; language that connects the church to Vineyard USA; the purpose of the board; a non-discretionary selection process for board members (to avoid having selection be the sole responsibility or decision of the senior pastor; requirements for composition of the board members (e.g. pastor, theologian, finance, legal, and/or counseling background); board structure; board member vetting and approval procedures; board member removal policies; conflict of interest provisions; procedure for amending bylaws; succession planning; pastor role and responsibilities; ordination; and coordination between Vineyard USA and church regarding disassociation.</p> <p>Model protocols and policies on topics including, but not limited to employment matters; child and youth protection matters; social media; drug and alcohol policies; investigative processes; links to applicable laws, regulations, policies, and comprehensive mandatory reporting obligations under federal and state statutes. List of vetted resources available through the SRLs and RLs for local churches. The resources may include investigative assistance; suggested training; board consulting; financial auditing; counseling, including marriage and trauma; substance abuse resources; attorneys who work in non-profit and ministry spaces; and other church and pastor services.</p>
1(i).	<p><u>Continue to Enhance Training and Programming for Leadership, Staff, and Volunteers:</u> Vineyard USA should create and provide training programs to support any newly created policies or processes.</p>

1(j).	<u>Increased Super Regional Leader ("SRL") Resourcing</u> : Vineyard USA should consider increasing the number of SRLs to enhance engagement and feedback from local Vineyard churches and pastors to Vineyard USA and vice versa.
1(k).	<u>Vineyard USA Leadership Training</u> : Vineyard USA should conduct yearly training for AL/RL/SRLs at a conference, retreat, and/or celebration to teach as well as transform and inspire attendees, to give them renewed commitment and vision.
1(l).	<u>Annual Census</u> : In an annual Vineyard census, Vineyard USA should request information regarding church financial health, reports and allegations of abuse and misconduct, and/or concerns relative to church governance.

## **Finding 2: No Documented Reporting Mechanism or Response Processes for Allegations or Concerns of Misconduct Across the Vineyard Movement in the United States**

### **Recommendations**

2(a).	<u>24-hour Reporting Email</u> : Vineyard USA should continue to make available the Reporting Email to receive reports of concerns of leadership misconduct. These concerns can be received anonymously or in true name.
2(b).	<u>Reporting Email Visibility</u> : Vineyard USA should more prominently highlight the Reporting email on Vineyard websites, making it available on its main page. Vineyard USA should also encourage local churches and other affiliates of Vineyard USA to highlight the reporting email.
2(c).	<u>Process for Responding to Allegations of Misconduct in Churches</u> : Vineyard USA should document a consistent reporting, investigation, adjudication, and resolution process. The process should include policies on confidentiality, conflicts of interest, non-retaliation, record keeping, and whistleblower protections.
2(d).	<u>Support to Local Churches</u> : Vineyard USA should develop vetted resources including legal, investigative, and counseling resources to support local churches in their investigations of misconduct based upon church and pastor standards.
2(e).	<u>Conciliation/Mediation</u> : Vineyard USA should vet any conciliation/mediation service used and ensure that the service providers are trauma informed.

## **Finding 3: Lack of Meaningful Standards, Guidance, or Accountability for Vineyard USA Staff**

### **Recommendations**

3(a).	<u>Employee Manual</u> : Vineyard USA should review the 2023 <i>Employee Manual</i> , and update or add policies that would provide meaningful standards, guidelines, or accountability for Vineyard USA staff. Policies to be considered for review should include a documented reporting policy; disciplinary or investigative process; conflicts of interest policy regarding the hiring of relatives; an employee Code of Conduct and conciliation/mediation resources.
-------	---

3(b).	<u>A Leadership Focused Handbook</u> : Vineyard USA should clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of the Vineyard USA National Team, and Regional and Area leadership.
-------	--

## CONCLUSION

Vineyard's history is founded upon creativity, inclusion, and autonomy which has allowed the church to effectively grow and multiply. However, as the Vineyard movement in the United States has grown, it has shown weaknesses in consistently applying standards and addressing issues of concern. For the movement to continue in a healthy fashion, there is a need for more structure and governance to better protect Vineyard members, their churches, and their staff. The Vineyard has already begun building these structures through the efforts of the ReOrg. Our assessment revealed that a formal connection between Vineyard USA and its affiliated churches, and defined governance would be beneficial for the continued health and cohesive growth of the movement. The next step will be to bring churches and the National Team together to plan a way forward for the continued development of structures that will balance the best of Vineyard culture with the demands of a modern and mature ministry.