



Strategy Team Monthly Newsletter

We are at an exciting time in our church's history! We are on the way to finding a new Senior Pastor to lead us in our next stage of ministry, we are seeing God move in the hearts of many people leading to positive changes in lives, marriages, and families, and we have teams collaborating in efforts to be the healthiest church we can be, helping to lead us to unity in our church family. We are praising God for all He has done, is doing and will continue to do through us for our community!

This newsletter, put forth from the Strategic Planning Team, is an effort to be transparent with our church family about what we have been doing to help guide GREFC in the direction we feel God is asking us to go. Throughout this entire process, we have earnestly and prayerfully sought God's will for our church family and the unique way He wants to use us to draw closer those who are far from Him.

We do not have it all figured out yet, and we've had some setbacks, but we know God is faithful to lead us where we need to go. There's a lot to share but we want you all to be as informed as possible in the hope that you will be eager to join us on this journey. So, sit back and relax and please take some time to read this newsletter, the first of several.

History of the Strategy Team

When we completed construction of the new Worship Center and renovation of our building in the spring of 2019, there was a sense of excitement in the air. We now had space to do ministry like we'd always wanted to. New people were joining us each week and our ministries were expanding.

The Elders wanted to take advantage of this growing momentum and decided that it would be a good time to redefine the vision of our church and the strategy for how we make disciples.

The reality was, that while our church was growing and people were engaging in our ministry events, we were still lacking in mature disciples. The evidence of this could be seen in the lack of leaders in multiple ministry areas, the poor turnouts to trainings we offered, a severe shortage in people willing to serve on a weekly basis, few deep and close relationships within the church body, and the scarcity of life-on-life discipleship leading to real life change.

That reality, coupled with increasing evidence of nationwide declines in church attendance and statistics showing that only 10% of college graduates leave school with a resilient faith, caused the Elders to face the reality that what we'd been doing in our ministries wasn't working very well at creating mature disciples with a resilient faith that produced other mature disciples.

The Elders asked that a team be formed, made up of leadership and staff, to explore and recommend changes to our ministry strategy in the hopes that we could be more effective at leading people to a mature faith in Jesus Christ that exhibited more fruit and reproduction of mature disciples.

This new Vision/Strategic Planning Team met for the first time in May of 2019 and included the following people: Quintin Legler – Chairman of the Elder Board, Matt Grose – Executive Board Chairman and Elder, Sarah Schrapp – Children's Ministry Director, Larry Curtiss – Men's Ministry Leader (and later

Elder), Kristen Panchyshyn – Women’s Ministry Leader, Ken Abramson – Senior Pastor (now retired), Steve Wick – Associate Pastor of Discipleship, and Michelle Schwake – Communications Director. When Interim Pastor Ron Weller came on board, he joined the team as well.

A New Vision

The first effort of this new committee was to tackle a new Vision Statement. While the mission of many Christian churches is generally the same – to love God and love others - the vision is a shorter-term goal (5-15 years) that is the unique way a specific church will make decisions about ministry to accomplish the mission.

That summer, after much discussion, the group determined several aspects that we wanted to emphasize in our vision:

- Real life change happens in the context of close, personal and loving relationships where one person guides, challenges and supports another to grow in love for God, faith and maturity,
- These relationships had to be purposeful and intentional and that simply being together and being known was not sufficient to bring about the change we hoped to see,
- We wanted a greater emphasis on what it means to be a church family with an emphasis on John 17, loving one another and counting on each other through all that life brings,
- An emphasis on being a mature disciple wasn’t enough. Our emphasis needed to be on making mature disciple makers who in turn make disciple makers, with an emphasis on reproduction,
- Our church was unique in its desire to minister to and equip all generations, from the littlest preschooler to the grandparent,
- And that an intimate and personal relationship with Jesus Christ was to be the center of all that we do.

The result was our current vision statement:

Together, living with purpose, by:

- **Building a community that loves everyone deeply,**
- **Developing personal relationships that lead others closer to Jesus,**
- **Equipping each generation to follow Jesus and become disciple makers.**

In October 2019, Pastor Ken Abramson launched the sermon series, “Together, Living with Purpose” to share the vision with the entire congregation. For those that weren’t here or that want to re-visit that sermon series, you can find it on the Sermons page of our website or listen to our podcast available at most popular podcasting sites.

A New Strategy

During the vision-focused sermon series, the committee continued meeting. Several very big questions were now before us:

- How could our church actually accomplish this amazing but daunting vision we had set for ourselves?
- How could we help facilitate those relationships?
- What strategies and frameworks could we put in place to encourage life-on-life disciple making?
- What changes were we willing to make in ministries, budgets and staffing?
- Where were we going to find leaders for all of this?
- What were we going to say “Yes” to and what were we going to say “No” to in our ministry areas?
- How were people going to react when we started making changes and were we prepared for that reaction?
- How long was all this going to take?!

Culture change takes a long time. We knew that in general, it takes about 20% of a population to be on board with the vision to start to make a change in the culture toward that vision. For us, that meant that we needed about 55 to 60 people to start living out the vision for it to start to become a part of our culture.

Even though we were just starting to figure out how to re-structure all that we do to support our vision, we knew that we wanted to get started on helping people develop disciple making relationships to start to change our culture toward our new vision.

That fall we started inviting people to the Disciple Maker’s Handbook studies. This study lays the basis for why relational disciple making is so important for churches. In the past, churches relied on their programs to disciple those in their congregations. But as we see a decline in people attending churches, we realize that programs, while helpful, cannot disciple people to maturity. The fact is that programs don’t disciple people...people disciple people.

We were just starting our second round of Disciple Maker Handbook studies when the COVID-19 pandemic hit us in March of 2020. Then in October of 2020, Senior Pastor Ken Abramson retired. Interim pastor Ron Weller started with us in January of 2021. During all that time of change the committee continued to meet, even if sporadically, to continue with our strategy discussions.

As Pastor Ron joined us and we embarked on the 5-Step IPM Process, we just continued what we were doing since Strategic Planning was an element in the process. Our focus during this time was on creating a Discipleship Pathway. This pathway would serve as a framework for how we would structure our ministries to achieve our goals. We’ll talk more about this pathway in the next newsletter.

Kids Micro Groups Trial

Before we ever developed the discipleship pathway, we knew we wanted to emphasize intentional relationships in our ministries through groups and specifically smaller groups with greater accountability. We started calling these Micro Groups which are groups of 3-4 (more on why we chose Micro Groups in the next newsletter).

As the pandemic continued into the fall of 2020, we had the perfect opportunity to try out smaller groups in our Kid’s Ministry.

Last fall, our kids started forming into Groups – we realized “Micro” didn’t work as well for kids. We ended up having eight groups of kids meeting on various nights of the week, some here at the church building and some in people’s homes. We weren’t sure how it was going to go but we had willing and engaged volunteer leaders and lots of kids who wanted to join.

The results were amazing!

We’ve seen much fruit come from the connections and growth that have happened in these settings. As kids gathered in consistent groups with a consistent leader on a regular basis, deeper relationships formed, both among the kids, but also the kids with their leaders. The possibility for growing closer to God together was maximized.

Before the pandemic, our Kidz ROC attendance varied from week to week with approximately 35-40 kids participating. In Micro Groups, we had 48 kids participating who were very consistent!

After the very positive experience of Kid’s Groups this past school year, the Elders and Strategic Planning Team recognized that this format is a great fit with the vision of our church.

For these reasons, we have decided to continue with the Kids Group format for Fall 2022 for our mid-week Kid’s Ministry programming. We will not return to the previous Kidz ROC program. Although Kidz ROC was enjoyed by many for several years, we believe the model we’ve followed this past year in Kid’s Ministry allows for the greatest opportunity for us to disciple kids well.

We understand that without a return to the weekly family meals prior to Wednesday night activities, we will be missing some connection and community time. Because of this, there are plans to have regular gathering times for all families throughout the year.

Parents will soon receive communication with more details about Kids Groups this fall. We ask that you pray for these upcoming groups and even consider being a Kids Group Leader for a small group of kids this fall!

Monthly Newsletters

Thank you for reading all the way through! We plan to continue sending out a monthly newsletter to help further explain our Strategic Planning efforts. Next month we will delve into the Discipleship Pathway, more about Groups and what it means to be a mature disciple maker.

Continue to pray for the Strategic Planning Team and for the Search Team and Elders as we move forward in this process. We are fully dependent on the Holy Spirit and God’s Will during this entire process.

God is so good, isn’t He? He knows our tomorrows and loves and guides us as we faithfully seek Him. We praise and thank Him all the time for you, our amazing church family. Enjoy the upcoming holiday with family and friends and be looking for next month’s newsletter.

Trusting In Him,

The Strategic Planning Team