

*Jesus Metropolitan Community Church*  
**25 Year Strategic Plan  
To Bless The World**

Discussion Draft: October 22, 2009

This document is presented for your prayerful consideration. If you have questions or comments regarding this discussion draft, please email [pastorjeff@jesusmcc.org](mailto:pastorjeff@jesusmcc.org) and he will share your thoughts with the entire Board. We will also schedule several congregational forums for face-to-face discussion.

## **Disclaimers**

We are under no illusion that we can see 25 years into the future. But we also feel that God is calling us to do the kind of things that are *So Big* they require time to plan, implement, and execute. We have no choice but to think long term, yet we also recognize that, as time unfolds, this Plan will need to be regularly revised to reflect actual developments inside and outside our Church.

We also realize that we can accomplish the bold objectives stated in this plan *only by God's grace*. The magnitude of our objectives is a measure of our faith in God, not faith in ourselves. We know that God specializes in using unlikely people. We also know that we will need to work with others. We are only a piece of God's puzzle – part of a movement of God's Spirit that is much bigger than ourselves.

## **Introduction**

*"For God so loved the world. . . ."* John 3:16. The implications are profound.

If God is passionately in love with this world, then we who love God ought to reflect that same burning passion. God has raised up our congregation for a reason and entrusted us with certain gifts that can bless the world. Our job is to figure out what those gifts are and then share them with extravagant love.

We who are part of Jesus MCC sense that something unusual is happening here. God is drawing together a congregation of people who have the vision, gifts, and commitment to impact the world. Margaret Meade once said:

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*

A Brazilian proverb says:

*When we dream alone, it's only a dream. When we dream together, it's the beginning of a new reality.*

We, the congregation of Jesus MCC, believe God is calling us to play a pivotal role in helping to create a new reality, one that is described in this Plan. We invite you to join us! *Together, we can – and will – change history!*

## **Overview of Our Vision**

In 1997 our congregation unanimously adopted its first Vision Statement. Since then, we have updated that Statement several times – each time unanimously. This document builds on that foundation. The objectives identified below represent a natural evolution of our prior Statements. Here we are simply refining and more precisely defining what we feel called to do now that we have walked a little further down the road and can see a little more clearly. Specifically, over the next 25 years, we feel called . . .

- Objective 1 – To change the course of modern Christianity by playing a key role in the Emerging Church Movement (defined below) – a Movement that is challenging Christianity to return to its ancient roots in the Jesus of the Gospels.
- Objective 2 – To ensure that millions of LGBT people across the globe gain access to a vibrant, affirming Gospel message and have the opportunity to become followers of Jesus – and to ensure they are welcomed and celebrated in the Emerging Church.
- Objective 3 – To promote civil justice for LGBT people globally by ensuring they are fully integrated into Christianity via the Emerging Church Movement – so that the Church universal becomes a powerful advocate of LGBT equality.
- Objective 4 – To relieve the poverty and suffering of millions by ensuring that the Emerging Church, collectively, and our congregation, individually, give highest priority to radical sharing.
- Objective 5 – To love and support one another individually within our congregation at the highest level, even as we seek to change the world together.<sup>1</sup>

If we accomplish these goals, we'll be able to look back in 25 years and celebrate that God used us to help shape the course of Christianity for the next generation, to help open Christianity to a whole new tribe of people – LGBT people – as never before, to help the global LGBT justice movement take a giant leap forward, to catalyze Christianity to be more responsive to those who suffer, and to take really great care of one another as we walked this incredible journey together.

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<sup>1</sup> Our prior Vision Statements have defined a three-pronged mission: (a) making disciples; (b) doing justice; and (c) helping those in greatest need. Each of the five objectives identified here corresponds to one or more of the prongs in prior vision statements. The correspondence is as follows: Making Disciples = Objectives 1, 2, and 5. Doing Justice = Objectives 1, 3, and 4. Helping Those In Need = Objectives 2, 3, 4, and 5. Here we are simply being more specific about what we feel called to do under each of these prongs.

## Explanation Of Our Vision

Before elaborating on each objective, we want to make three general points. First, we have deliberately omitted numerical objectives from this document. Our job is to focus on what God has called us to do; God’s job is to decide when and how to give increase.

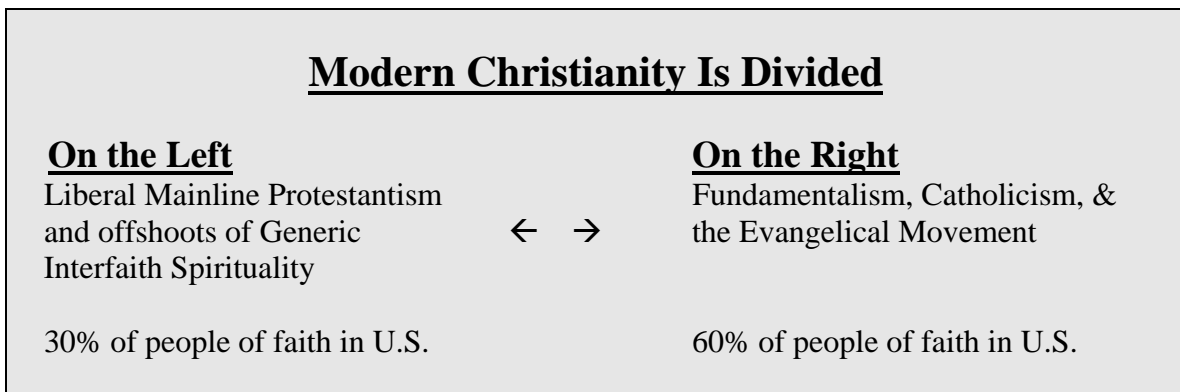
Second, when we use the word “global” in this document, we don’t just mean people on the other side of the planet. We mean people everywhere, including right here in central Indiana, in the U.S., and beyond.

Third, the objectives are NOT listed in order of priority. Each is equally important.

- **Objective 1 – To change the course of modern Christianity by playing a key role in the Emerging Church Movement (defined below) – a Movement that is challenging Christianity to return to its ancient roots in the Jesus of the Gospels.**

Most of us sense that we have something very special at Jesus MCC. Our Church is an unusual blend of evangelical passion and progressive thought. This combination is compelling. Some might call it the “genius” of our Church. We believe modern Christianity (the Church universal) needs a whole lot more of what we have.

Throughout the centuries God has raised up various renewal movements to keep Christianity true to its roots in Jesus. As time passes, Christianity goes through periods of drift. Almost like clockwork, every few centuries corrections are needed. During the last century and a half, Christianity has become polarized between liberals and conservatives. The graph below gives a quick glimpse of where we stand today:



The factions on both ends of the Christian spectrum have certain strengths. Some of the greatest strengths of liberal Christianity are:

- Celebration of diversity
- Valuing scholarship
- Encouraging independent thought
- Focus on global transformation

Some of the greatest strengths of conservative Christianity are:

- Emphasis on a personal relationship with Jesus
- Emphasis on practical spiritual teaching and discipleship education
- High commitment from rank-and-file members
- Focus on personal transformation

Both “sides” of Christianity also have weaknesses that mirror the strengths of the other. It is almost as if the Christian mind and heart have been cleaved in two, with each half reflecting certain compelling virtues, but also displaying dramatic weaknesses. The virtues of both forms of Christianity are listed above. Now for the weaknesses:

#### Conservative Christianity – Weaknesses

- Rejection of diversity; wants “cookie-cutter” Christians
- Suspicious and often dismissive of scholarship
- One-way thinking that squelches honest questions and independent thought
- Indifferent to the suffering of the world and need for global transformation

#### Progressive Christianity – Weaknesses

- Shy about calling people into relationship with Christ
- Tendency to preach and teach academically, instead of practically
- Low commitment from rank-and-file members
- Rarely talk about the need for personal transformation

Neither of these polar-opposite forms of Christianity will thrive in the future. Although Conservative Christianity experienced gains in recent decades, the general public is becoming increasingly aware of its limitations and turned off by its narrowness. Culture is rapidly moving away from conservative Christianity, especially young people. Meanwhile, liberal Christianity has been losing steam and numerically declining for 40 years. Clearly it’s not the future of Christianity. So what is? What form of Christianity will have both the intelligence and energy to captivate the next generation?

Many are beginning to ask an obvious question: Why can’t we bridge the gap between liberals and conservatives, creating holistic churches that draw the best from both? Why can’t we create churches that are equally passionate about both personal and global transformation?

That is precisely what we are doing at Jesus MCC with great success. Because of who we are, a church that blends Christians from a broad variety of backgrounds, we have learned to draw the best from both ends of the spectrum.

And we are not alone. In recent years, a new movement has begun to arise within Christianity called the “Emerging Church.” As more and more Christians have begun asking why we can’t have the best of both liberal and conservative Christianity, more and more churches have been responding – blending the discipleship passion of conservative

churches with the open-mindedness of liberal churches. Many scholars believe this emerging wave represents what Christianity will look like 50 years from now. We share that conviction.

Because the term “Emerging Church” is rather vague, however, it is quickly beginning to mean all things to all people. Thus, definition is important. When we use the term to describe our Church, we mean the following:

1. ***We are passionate about Jesus.*** We believe Jesus is both Lord and Savior. Our desire is to enter into personal relationship with him, learn about him, and live in his Way. Although we deeply respect other religions and spiritual perspectives, and hold them in high regard, we are clear that we are seeking God through Jesus Christ.
2. ***We are serious about the Bible.*** Although we hold differing views of inspiration, we agree that the Bible is inspired and should be the primary source of spiritual training for followers of Jesus. We believe the Bible is a living book that invites us into active dialogue with God in our daily lives – not some dusty ol’ book of rules frozen in time. We believe that following Jesus is more about relationship than rules.
3. ***We celebrate diversity.*** In our churches, all are welcome regardless whether they are white or black, Asian or Hispanic, conservative or liberal, old or young, rich or poor, married or single, straight or gay, transgender or any gender identity. We affirm full participation by women in all aspects of leadership. We affirm the full dignity and sanctity of both straight and gay spousal relationships.
4. ***We encourage independent thought.*** We are united by our passion for Jesus and emphasis on the Scriptures, but beyond that we feel it is critical that each Christian work out the details his or her faith. We believe in a “generous orthodoxy” – meaning, we do not wish to slice and dice ourselves a million different ways based on narrow theological arguments. We agree on the basics of Christianity and respect our differences in doctrinal details.
5. ***We believe that following Jesus is not just a part of life, but a Way of life.*** Our Church encourages people to make radical, encompassing commitments to live as followers of Jesus. We are deeply committed to the importance of both personal transformation and global transformation. Jesus calls us to both. We believe God has put us here to make a difference. We are determined to do all we can to heal the world – “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.”

The foregoing principles capture the essence of who we are at Jesus MCC. But please don’t misunderstand. That does not mean everyone at Jesus MCC thinks alike. Far from it! If a church is effectively balancing both Progressive and Evangelical values, it will be

appealing to both Progressive and Evangelical Christians. Many in our Church are predominantly Progressive; many others are predominantly Evangelical; and many more fall somewhere in between. To maintain this broad distribution, a Church like ours must operate from the center, carefully balancing both Progressive and Evangelical values. The result is a diverse congregation united by a common vision that is balanced and holistic.

Again, some refer to churches like ours as “Emerging Churches.” A more technically precise term might be “Progressive Evangelical Churches.” Regardless what label is used, however, we believe this form of Christianity – holistically blending both Progressive and Evangelical tendencies – authentically reflects the Jesus of the Gospels and is enormously compelling. We seek to be that kind of Church and to promote the rapid spread of this approach by projecting our message, training like-minded spiritual leaders, and establishing, supporting, and partnering with other like-minded churches. We are also determined that LGBT people globally will have access to this compelling form of Christianity, which leads to our next objective.

- **Objective 2 – To ensure that millions of LGBT people across the globe gain access to a vibrant, affirming Gospel message and have the opportunity to become followers of Jesus – and to ensure they are welcomed and celebrated in the Emerging Church.**

Historically, the Church universal has ignored, excluded, and often persecuted LGBT people. As a result, most LGBT people have never had a viable Gospel witness. To begin to grasp the magnitude of the problem, consider a simple example. Below is a list of the top ten cities of the world by population. To our knowledge, only three of these world-class cities have churches offering an affirming Gospel witness, leaving seven of the world’s top ten cities with nothing. (If you don’t believe us, do an online search yourself.) If 10% of the people in the seven cities identified below are LGBT, that represents 12 million LGBT people who have no local option for following Jesus.

### **World’s Largest Cities**

**Those without an affirming Gospel witness marked with an asterisk.**

- \* Tokyo, Japan – 28,025,000**
- \* Mexico City, Mexico – 18,131,000**
- \* Mumbai, India – 18,042,000**
- \* Sao Paulo, Brazil – 17,711,000**
- New York City, USA – 16,626,000
- \* Shanghai, China – 14,173,000**
- Lagos, Nigeria – 13,488,000
- Los Angeles, USA – 13,129,000
- \* Calcutta, India – 12,900,000**
- \* Buenos Aires, Argentina – 12,431,000**

And that's just ten cities. Now imagine all the other cities, towns, hamlets, and villages across the globe – and all the LGBT people living in them. How many of them are within driving or walking distance of an affirming Emerging Church?

The enormous demand for churches like ours is evidenced by the people who contact our Church for help. So far, we've barely even begun to project our message, yet already look what's happening.

## **A Few Examples of People Who Have Contacted Our Church For Help**

**Names and locations modified slightly for reasons of confidentiality**

**Kathy Jean, Wichita Kansas**

21 yr. old Lesbian addict came back to God through our book

**Brian, London, UK**

Young adult who found spiritual renewal through our web sermons

**Sue, Rural Oregon**

55 yr. old transgender woman finding courage to come out through our web sermons

**Elaina, Barbados**

Young mother found peace through our web resources and phone counseling

**Abdula, Saudi Arabia**

Suicidal young gay Arab Christian reaches out for help

**Angel, Jamaica**

Loves our "Christ-centered" approach; has listened to dozens of our web sermons

**Julie, San Antonio, Texas**

23 yr. old Lesbian says she'd probably be dead without our book

**Karl, Sydney Australia**

His MCC has found our "Gospel-centered" discipleship materials transformational

**Savanah, Tucson, Arizona**

Moved from Indy, but surviving on our web sermons

**Phil, Western Australia**

Says our "Christ-centered" sermons have encouraged him

**Ray, San Diego**

76 yr old man finds spiritual freedom finally through our book

Clearly there is a great demand for what we can share. Many are gravitating toward us precisely because we are that unique blend of both Progressive and Evangelical values that is the hallmark of the Emerging Church Movement. The vast majority of affirming churches in the world today lean almost exclusively toward the Progressive side, with little appreciation of Evangelical values. For example, here in Indianapolis, we are the only affirming Church actively blending both sides of the Christian spectrum. The fact that we embrace certain Evangelical values (as well as certain Progressive values) gives our message a powerful resonance with that 60% of the U.S. population who come from Evangelical backgrounds.

We want to share what we have been given. We believe the message of Jesus is transformational. We have experienced life in Christ and want to make that gift available to others. Our mission is NOT to cram Jesus down anyone's throat; nor is it to criticize other religions. Our goal is NOT heavy-handed evangelism. We simply want to ensure that LGBT people across the globe who wish to follow Jesus have that opportunity.

We will do this by projecting our message *until it becomes pervasive*, by raising up and sending out cutting-edge spiritual leaders, and by planting and partnering with like minded churches. But even all that will not be enough – which is why Jesus MCC must become an influential force in the Emerging Church Movement. For the most part, many in the Emerging Church Movement are open to re-evaluating Christianity's negative stance toward LGBT people. This provides a strategic opening! By becoming a visible presence in the Emerging Church Movement, by letting them see the light of Christ in us, Jesus MCC can help ensure that the Emerging Church Movement embraces LGBT people. Our strategy can be reduced to the following logic:

If Emerging Churches are the wave of the future in Christianity as we believe; and . . .

If we can persuade Emerging Churches to fully embrace LGBT people; then . . .

It follows that LGBT people will be fully included in the future of Christianity.

And if that can be accomplished, LGBT people globally will not only gain full access to the teachings of Jesus; their justice struggle will also take an enormous leap forward, which brings us to our next objective.

- **Objective 3 – To promote civil justice for LGBT people globally by ensuring they are fully integrated into Christianity via the Emerging Church Movement – so that the Church universal becomes a powerful advocate of LGBT equality.**

Imagine a world in which most Christians were pushing for equal treatment of LGBT people, instead of working against. Instantly, the politics of the world's majority

Christian nations would swing in favor of LGBT people. Picture it – a multitude of churches in a million different cities and hamlets across the globe insisting that the teachings of Jesus require equal treatment of LGBT people. From a justice perspective, this is the greatest gift we could give the world.

In other words, the most powerful way we can “do justice” is to seek to influence the course of Christianity. That doesn’t mean we won’t engage in other more routine justice activities – like participating in ICON, educating legislators in Indiana and Congress, and seeking the change public policy in our state and nation. But all those efforts will pale in comparison to the global justice impact we can have if we influence the future course of Christianity.

Efforts to project our spiritual message widely are also vital to our justice objective. Imagine the impact on justice issues in the U.S. if our Church was able to begin broadcasting its worship services to the general public. Suddenly scary stereotypes that drive anti-LGBT energy would be undermined as the general populace gained an authentic glimpse of LGBT Christians.

But LGBT people are not the only tribe who suffers greatly in this world. The love of God knows no bounds. Our mission cannot be limited to the challenges of LGBT people. Hence our next objective:

- **Objective 4 – To relieve the poverty and suffering of millions by ensuring that the Emerging Church, collectively, and our congregation, individually, gives highest priority to radical sharing.**

A recent study by the World Bank (2003) identified how many people are living in abject poverty. The numbers are staggering.

<u><b>World Bank Study</b></u>			
<u>Status</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Yearly Wage</u>	<u>Lifetime Earnings</u>
Grinding Poverty	1.2 billion	<\$365	<\$14,600
Absolute Poverty	1.6 billion	<\$730	<\$29,200

As the foregoing indicates, almost 3 billion people are living in desperate poverty – almost half the earth’s population. Did that register? Almost half of all people alive today earn less than \$2 per day!

Suppose you earn a salary of \$15,000 per year. In America, we consider that pretty meager. Yet, at just \$15,000 per year, in two years you will earn more money than half the earth’s population will in a lifetime. Someone who earns just \$15,000 per year is in the top 10% of wealth in the world. By any objective global measure, our congregation (like all U.S. congregations) is fabulously wealthy!

Jesus says, *“To whom much is given, of them shall much be required.”* Luke 12:48. John the Apostle says, *“How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help?”* I John 3:17. Authentic followers of Jesus care passionately about the poor of this world.

As a congregation, we have a sacred obligation to become acquainted, firsthand, with poverty in the world (as we have begun to do at the Horizon House in Indianapolis and in the Sudan and the Navajo Nation), to build relationships with sisters and brothers in need, to work with them to identify how we can make a difference, and then to respond with radical generosity. By “radical generosity,” we meant the kind of giving that stretches us as a congregation and as individuals, wherever we find ourselves on our spiritual journey.

But our focus must not be limited to what we can do as individuals and a single congregation. The challenges of world poverty outstrip our resources – which is yet another reason why we must share our message far and wide! We must do everything in our power to multiply the resources available to fight poverty by influencing other Christians and other congregations to embrace radical generosity. Most Emerging Churches are already taking a hard look at what they can do to respond to poverty. By our example, and by our participation in that Movement, we can reinforce the focus on poverty and partner with other congregations to achieve more in areas of critical need. We can also seek to influence other MCC congregations, and must ensure that any churches we plant share our passion for addressing poverty.

But none of what we have talked about in this document will be achievable unless we ensure that our home base, our own congregation, is rock solid, which leads to our last great objective:

- **Objective 5 – To love and support one another individually within our congregation at the highest level, even as we seek to change the world together.**

If we don’t love and support each other well, nothing else will matter. Jesus said, *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”* John 15:12. So how did Jesus love his disciples?

First and foremost, he was concerned with their spiritual well being. He invested enormous time and energy to teach, challenge, and mentor his followers spiritually. This is called discipleship. As Jesus said, *“What does it profit a person to gain the whole world, but lose his/her soul?”* Luke 9:25. We have a profound responsibility to do everything in our power to equip our congregation for a lifetime of spiritual growth and development – both adults and children.

Second, we have a responsibility to befriend one another on life’s journey and to be there for one another for the long haul. Friendship is as essential to life as food and drink. Within our congregation, we must do everything we can to promote the formation of

loving, lasting spiritual friendships, and to develop top-notch response networks to support each of us when we face major life challenges. As the old hymn says, “*They will know we are Christians by our love.*”

Third, we have a responsibility to equip one another, at a very practical level, for better living. Again and again, in our own congregation, we have seen people whose lives – and spiritual progress – are derailed by practical problems like: relationships formed, relationships ended, financial distress, parental overload, addictions, poor conflict management, and carelessness about the temple that is our bodies. Holistic discipleship demands that we care for, and equip, the whole person. We must develop cutting-edge resources to support one another in these practical life challenges.

## **Tactical Requirements Of Our Vision**

So, what will we do to make the foregoing vision a reality? What specific steps will we take to move from vision to reality?

Below we identify six key steps necessary to achieving our strategic vision. We are deliberately keeping this list short and focused – identifying those things most essential to achieving our vision. Remember, this is a 25 year plan. Each of the items below is a major initiative that will take time to achieve. That’s why we need to get focused and get going!

Over the next year, the Board and staff, working with key ministry groups and volunteers, will develop specific proposals to guide each of these six initiatives. These proposals will be shared with the congregation for comment, then implemented.

***Step 1. We will relentlessly project our message until it becomes pervasive! We will do this by . . .***

- a. Leveraging the Internet. We will create a cutting-edge team of volunteers to execute a detailed strategy for spreading our message across the Internet. We will explore every creative opportunity, including web sites, chat rooms, Face Book, You Tube, Twitter, search engine maximization, etc.
- b. Publishing. Our publishing ministry, Found Pearl Press, will accelerate its efforts to publish and promote spiritual resources for the LGBT Community and beyond. Multiple additional products are already in the pipeline. (As part of this plan, we must find a way to free-up enough time for our Senior Pastor to write more books. See Infrastructure discussion below.)
- c. Radio and Broadcast. We will explore options for breaking into radio and TV, including the possibility of advertisements that drive people to our web locations and position us as a premier source of Christian resources

for LGBT people, including sermons, daily devotionals, discipleship materials, books, CDs, music, etc.

This first step is essential to achieving Strategic Objectives 1, 2, 3, and 4.

***Step 2. We will continue to develop, refine, and share a discipleship program (SoulShift) capable of supporting a movement of churches like ours.***

As our message spreads, many more individuals (and churches) will want to be part of this exciting movement of the Spirit. We must be ready to provide discipleship resources that reflect the values of the Emerging Church Movement and help people move from initial interest to fully-engaged followers of Jesus. These materials are equally important to individuals within our congregation and our ability to build disciples here at home. Our materials need to support not just adults, but children!

This second step will support Strategic Objectives 1, 2, and 5.

***Step 3. We will create a means for recruiting, training, and deploying powerful, cutting-edge spiritual leaders who share the values of the Emerging Church Movement.***

Since the Emerging Church Movement is so young, it does not yet have established training institutions. Generally speaking, existing seminaries are either decidedly Progressive or decidedly Evangelical. Given the vacuum of resources, we will probably need to establish a training institute at Jesus MCC that works in partnership with our local seminaries (Earlham School of Religion and Christian Theological Seminary), then grow our institute over time. Depending on how things develop, it may eventually need to become a seminary in its own right. This third step will also ensure a continuing supply of wonderful leaders for our own Church staff over the decades ahead. As our staff grows and as existing staff retire, we want to ensure there are plenty of potential young leaders who share the values of the Emerging Church Movement.

This third step will support Strategic Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

***Step 4. We will continue to develop, refine, and share our model for compassionate missions outreach.***

Locally, we already are engaging in several cutting-edge, need-meeting ministries, including the Homeless Ministry partnership with the Horizon House, the IYG Ministry, the Animal Ministry, and participation in the AIDS Walk and Damien Center Christmas Drive. Nationally and internationally, we have already established strong relationships with the Navajo Nation (New Mexico) and villages in the south of Sudan (in partnership with New

Community Project). Although these efforts are already significant, we view them as only the tip of the iceberg.

We intend to find ways to dramatically expand these existing programs and to establish others, as God leads and as additional resources are entrusted to us. We also intend to find ways to encourage other congregations to embrace our enthusiasm for helping those in greatest need and to either partner with us or create similar programs of their own.

This fourth step will support Strategic Objectives 1 and 4.

***Step 5. We will develop strategies for church planting and church partnerships.***

As we develop these strategies, we need to answer four key questions:

- a. Will we deliberately plant other churches? If so, when and how? (Among other options, we can explore the possibility of becoming a multi-site church with satellite congregations in remote areas.)
- b. How will we effectively integrate ourselves into the broader Emerging Church Movement?
- c. How will we engage and influence the MCC Movement?
- d. How will we support and sustain individuals who live in places where there is no affirming Emerging Church option? Could they become “virtual” partners of our Church? What support could we offer them, and they us?

This fifth step will support Objectives 1, 2, 3, and 4.

***Step 6. We will continue to develop and refine our means for supporting individuals in our own congregation at the highest level by . . .***

- a. Developing the power of our worship services.
- b. Expanding our discipleship training into practical areas like being single, relationships, finances, parenting, addictions, conflict management, and healthy lifestyles.
- c. Developing our small group offerings, so as to encourage the growth of spiritual friendship networks.
- c. Enhancing the ways we deliver pastoral care to existing members, and how we welcome and integrate newcomers into our congregation.

This sixth step will support Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

## **Congregational Infrastructure Requirements**

Even as we pursue the key initiatives identified above, we will need to keep an eye on several significant infrastructure needs within our Church. We can't be a Church that engages in healthy in-reach and outreach without keeping our organizational core strong. Areas for focus over the next 25 years include:

### **1. Staff Development.**

We are doing far too much for the amount of staff we currently have. We are especially concerned with the impossible scope of responsibilities resting on our Senior Pastor. At the earliest opportunity, we need to establish a new position of Chief Operating Officer, who would serve as a type of "Executive Pastor" responsible for managing the organizational and business side of our Church, freeing our Senior Pastor to focus on what we most need from him – spiritual leadership, preaching, teaching, and writing.

With our proliferation of small groups, we also desperately need a full-time Minister of Discipleship. The growth of our small group network will be limited until we can provide proper staff support for our small groups.

Our Church also currently lacks any paid secretarial support. Our clerical work is currently done by a combination of professional staff and a team of dedicated volunteers. Eventually, we will need the stability of a full-time secretarial support position for our professional staff, while always continuing to leverage volunteer support.

To retain top-notch staff, we need to provide a nurturing environment for staff that promotes ongoing development, self-care, supportive management, and salary parity with other Churches. Current staff salaries trail those of similarly sized churches by about 40%. (Source: "The Compensation Handbook for Church Staff," published by the Church Law & Tax Resource.)

Succession planning is also key. What will we do if Pastor Jeff gets sick or when he retires? We could ask the same question about Melody Merida, Mark Brown, and David Squire. Because our Church is rather unique – an affirming Emerging Church – finding the right future leaders will be a key challenge. All the more reason to develop a training institute as rapidly as feasible.

### **2. Tithing and Legacy League Bequests.**

Accomplishing the vision described in this document will require significant infusions of financial resources in the years ahead. We will not be able to operate at our full potential until there is a widely-shared commitment to tithing within our congregation. Achieving our full potential will also require the kinds of large capital contributions that often come from bequests in wills and insurance policies. Some of the most important steps our Church has been able to take so far – building acquisition and acquisition of web cast

equipment – have been made possible by members like Sherri Russell, Jan Stockton, and Richard Ramey who left significant sums in their wills or insurance policies. We need to expand awareness of our Legacy League Program for bequests and insurance policies.

### **3. Facilities Expansion.**

As our congregation continues to grow, we cannot keep adding worship services without killing our staff. As our sanctuary fills up, we will explore creative options like offering a “video café” worship experience, as many cutting-edge churches are doing. This would allow us to accommodate more people in simultaneous worship experiences in the Social Hall or elsewhere in our building. We can also explore the possibility of beaming our worship experience to various “offsite” locations in central Indiana – another strategy of many cutting-edge churches. Even with these kinds of creative strategies, though, it is likely we will need to expand the size of our building at some point in the next 25 years to construct a larger sanctuary and additional classroom space. This will require a major capital campaign.

### **4. MCC Affiliation.**

We are a member church in the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC). That membership affords us certain opportunities, but comes at a significant price. Currently, we are required to pay MCC 13% of all contributions to our Church, minus bequests and capital contributions. This assessment is far higher than most denominations charge. Our congregation will need to evaluate whether the investment we are making in MCC represents the best use of those funds and is consistent with our long-term Strategic Plan. If we were not to continue our association with MCC, we would be required by law to adjust the name of our Church, which raises a broader issue calling for careful consideration.

## **Conclusion**

The vision described in this document is enormous. But remember, we’re talking about a 25 year period. We are also talking about the most important work in the world – God’s work. If, over the course of 25 years, we are able to achieve most of the key initiatives described in this document, we will make an incredible positive impact. We will be a beautiful reflection of God’s love for this world. And we will have the satisfaction of knowing that, together, we really made a difference.

Look out world! Here we come!

*If God is for us, who can be against us? Romans 8:31.*

*Behold, I set before you an open door, which no one can shut. Revelation 3:8.*