

Lake Cities Community Church
Pastor Craig Schill
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Westward Ho! A Church Plant Update

What causes someone to leave a comfortable home and travel into the unknown? That was the big question in the last half of the 19th century as thousands of people set their sights on California and Oregon – Westward Ho was the cry! Manifest Destiny! That image is not unlike a church plant. In fact it is the image I used 20 months ago, at our very first “interest meeting” in April of 2006. When I talk of our church plant to other people, I still call you my Lewis and Clark families – or pioneers – leaving the comfortable and familiar to hitch your wagon to a new church heading down the trail.

George Washington Bush was a trapper in the wild Oregon Territory and later served with military distinction under Andrew Jackson. He returned from the frontier and married the daughter of a Baptist minister and had a successful farm north of Kansas City. Then, in 1844, thirty-two of his neighbors asked him to lead them to Oregon. Bush accepted and also decided to relocate his family and to become pioneers.

This morning, like those pioneer families of old, I want us to think about our church, as starting out on a journey. We have covered wagons packed and are on the trail. Our clothes are dusty and our wagons are loaded with provisions. We have left home, but are not yet at our destination. It is time to pause from our journey and take stock of where things are. I'd like to do that by (first) briefly looking back and remembering some of our preparation that led to the (second) launch of this church. Then (third) we will look at where we are at today as we come to the end of 2007 and (fourth) I want to have us think about three key changes that will come upon us in 2008.

Past Preparation (April 2006 – April 2007)

The Scripture has much to say about wise preparation and decision- making. [Luke 14:28](#) “For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Jesus is talking about discipleship – following Him – If you are going to follow Christ – are you ready to count the cost in your own life – just as you would do in preparation for a big building program? What a great image for our first year – as we sought to follow Christ and His calling upon this church. This preparation included many things – fasting, prayer, taking steps of faith, raising money, building up a core-group of people, developing relationships, Sunday night meetings and setting a mission statement, purposes and values.

During this time it might surprise you for me to remind us that *there was no guarantee that a church would necessarily be started*. The Lord needed to bring interested people and the finances necessary. And so we set out to pray. One avenue of prayer was a weekly e-mail prayer letter that started with just a handful of people, but grew to over 260 interested people praying for this church. Those e-mail updates are all on our web site and continue to be among the most read and downloaded files on our site as people recall what God did during those days.

And God responded to our prayers. Ultimately fourteen families felt the call of God to join our new church before it launched. The Lord also provided financially far beyond what anyone in the expected. I remember Dr. Darryl Bock saying at one of Trinity Fellowship’s elder’s meeting, “The vital signs look good!” And when Trinity finally decided to move forward with the church, Gary Barnes said, “We’re pregnant” meaning that a new baby church was to be born on Easter Sunday, 2007.

If you sometimes wonder if we did the right thing by starting this church I hope this look back gives your faith confidence. I remember the words of the late Dr. John Walvoord of Dallas Seminary. It was my first chapel service as a new seminarian, and he was very ill and pushed onto the stage in a wheel chair. With the Scripture in his lap he told us students that there would be times where you might doubt whether God has led you here, and he said, “Don’t doubt in the dark what God has shown you in the light.” As we look back with some perspective of time, we see that God had the lights on when he starting Lake Cities Community Church.

George Washington Bush back in 1844 took his preparation seriously. He sold his farm and nearly all of his possessions, and readied his wife and five sons for the journey. He took the money he has raised and built a false floor into his wagon to hide more that \$2000 in silver coins. He knew they would need these resources to not only provide for themselves but to help others along the way. Thirty-people – men women and children began to prepare themselves for the adventure that awaited them.

I don’t want to paint a perfect picture of our preparation time. There are things we would do differently. There were mistakes. But, through it all, the Lord directed our steps leading to the launch of Lake Cities Community Church on April 8, 2007.

The Launch – April 8, 2007

When I think of the launch of our church I think of Jesus’ words, [Matt. 16:18](#) “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. The rock Jesus is referring to here is somewhat famous as it provides the theology behind the Pope’s succession to Peter. But the “rock” in mind is probably not Peter

“*petros*” but Christ as the foundation stone for the church “*petra*”. Jesus is the head of the church, and it is on Him our foundation, cornerstone, that the church is built.

When Lake Cities Community Church was launched we were not alone, but are part of a growing movement in church planting. A group called *Leadership Network* sponsored extensive research and they concluded, “Church planting in North America is at an unprecedented high...church planting has come a long way from being a “last resort” profession to becoming a preferred ministry option.” It is estimated that 4,000 new churches are being planted each year in the United States, which may seem high, but is still low when compared to other parts of the world, such as India, where churches are exploding at even greater rates.

In the Old West, nearly all wagon trains had a specific launching point, which took place in St. Louis or Independence, Missouri. It was at these cities –that families would join together to accomplish similar goals and ambitions. The route would be agreed upon – they had a sense of where they were going, guides would be hired, dangers would be discussed and prepared for and provisions set aside for the long journey ahead. Then, they were ready to launch out on their journey. That was we did last April – we set out on the journey of planting a new church, to God’s glory.

The Journey – The Past Nine Months

We have been on that journey for 9 months and my friends we are just starting. Jesus said in [Luke 9:23](#), “**Take up your cross daily and follow-me.**” The life of the Christian is one of a journey following Christ – and not our own plans or desires. How have the last nine months been? Let’s take a few minutes to review.

Let me start by saying thank you to everyone who continues to work hard for this ministry. I know that it has not always been easy – we have encountered dangers and we have spotted an evil lion who lurks around our wagons seeking to destroy us – but how faithful God has been and how thankful I am for you and your faithful ministry.

Consider how many people and areas of ministry the Lord has allowed: We have an administrative team, children's ministry team, community life small groups and leaders, transitional elders, people who take care of our finances from counting money to writing checks. We have greeters, instrumentalists, people to make and print bulletins each week. A men's ministry that is starting, missionaries we support, a nursery ministry and prayer meetings. We have a set-up ministry with faithful servants, a sharing ministry that is growing and will continue to grow into 2008. A sound system with the best technicians in the world! A person who makes our slides for each service, coffee and snacks – we have Sunday School teachers, ushers, vocalists, women's ministry, a worshiping team and a youth ministry. Whew! Thanks to everyone who works so hard so that our church might make an impact for Christ!

God has provided for us in each area of ministry! We started with 14 families and by God's grace at this time we have kept all our original families (except the Klausli's who we sent as our missionaries to Germany) and we anticipate the loss of the Hart's in a few months. While keeping our original families we have added seven additional families or individuals over the past 9-months, bringing the current total to 20 families or individuals who call LCCC home. Of those, 12 have entered into formal membership.

While we started small that is a 50% growth rate in our in $\frac{3}{4}$ of a year and is a cause for praise to God.

How are our finances? From January (when we became financially independent) until now, our expenses continue to be more than our income. Expenses include not just operating expenses, but start-up costs, sounds system, trailer, etc. However, our income has been stronger than we originally forecasted, and so even in this there is reason to rejoice. Of the original amount raised, we will enter 2008 with about \$90,000 in the bank.

By way of perspective, in another church planting research study conducted by the Center for Missional Research in 2006, they found that only 30% of church plants were financially self-sufficient by the end of the first year, and only 40% by year two. 70% of continuing church plants are self-sufficient financially by year 5 (which means 30% are not). I don't know when we will reach that point – I pray it may still be by our first anniversary, but that is in the Lord's hands and we have much to be thankful for in terms of our provisions.

On the wagon trains as they would make there way out west – they knew they had to pace themselves. The provisions were being rationed out – that as OK – they had prepared for that – so they could travel for five months – to one day arrive safely at their destination – For a church, in a sense we will never arrive – but we will not always be a church plant. Typically, a new church is considered in start-up mode for four to five years. It is important that we keep that in mind. We are not a 10-year old church, or a five-year old church. We are not even a one-year old church! We have just begun this journey of faith.

The Future – Three Key Changes

If there is one thing for certain in our future it is that we will face change! As we conclude our message, let me talk about three key changes we will face in 2008.

First is location. Our first change is a probably change in location. We started at the Rowlett Bowl-a-Rama and have been at the Cinemark for the past 8 months and it looks like another change is probable. Now the church is us - we *the church* are the new temple of the Holy Spirit – God no longer dwells in a building, but in each of us. And that is one positive lesson I hope we have learned from 2007. But even so, decisions about facility are not unimportant. The Fire Marshal is now positive about our church meeting at the former Rowlett Learning Center at Industrial and Kirby. Though it has taken longer than we expected, Lord willing, we should make a transition to this facility sometime in January. This move will give us a stronger connection with the Rowlett community and open doors for additional ministry. Is it perfect? No – but if God is leading us it will be exactly what we need!

Second is worship. With the Hart family's transition to Kentucky coming in the near future, we have posted a worship coordinator job within our church, at Dallas Seminary and Southwestern Seminary. We have established a selection committee of the Hilbers, John Massey and myself. This will be a vital transition for us as a church. Does it mean that we are leaving our value of the richness of historic Christian worship? No. Does it mean that we might express that a little differently in the future – probably! The person God brings will certainly bring changes to not only how we construct our weekly worship services but the content as well. Does this mean that what we have been doing up until now has been bad? By no means! We have been so greatly blessed over these past 9 months and are thankful for all who have been involved. But it is an area where we should expect change in 2008.

Third is leadership. We have been blessed greatly with our transitional elder board of John Massey, Roger Shake and Larry Honea. They have guided us well in 2007 and will continue into 2008. But in 2008 we will begin to transition with our first elder appointed from our own membership. On January 13, in two weeks, I am very excited to announce to you that we will install Micah Foster as an elder of LCCC. He will join myself and our three other transitional elders and the five of us will make up the elder board for the church as we enter into 2008. This change is a true milestone for us as a new church.

Conclusion

George Washington Bush – got his wagon train safely to Oregon – they went through most of their provisions and savings, they faced some dangers, but worked through the difficulty. Their preparation paid off and they were able to establish new homes and businesses out West.

We are still on the trail. We are on a journey of faith. Which of you who want to build a tower will not first stop to calculate the cost? Jesus said. We have sought to prepare well for Christ's work through LCCC. Jesus said, 'I will build my church.' While we seek to do our part, it is always in recognition that it is the Lord is at work building His body with His strength. And to all disciples Jesus said – "Take up your cross daily and follow-me." That is all we are seeking to do as a new church – to follow Christ on the journey of faith. Westward Ho!