

Lake Cities Community Church  
Pastor Craig Schill  
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State of the Church

**“Where Do We Go From Here?”**  
Exodus 18

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How many of you, over Christmas or New Years visited family, extended family or had family visit you? You were not alone! AAA reported that 66.7 million people were traveling over the holidays, mostly to visit family.

And that makes the holidays *either the most wonderful time of the year, or the most stressful time of the year!* Experts tell us that visiting family is the top cause of holiday stress. But while visiting family can be stressful, it can also be a great source of blessing. Tammy and I were blessed the last several days in Arizona visiting with our families, who both live in Phoenix. Everyone - both sides - got together for Christmas dinner and it was a time of encouragement and joy.

**Subject**

This morning as we consider the state of the church we are going to eavesdrop on another family gathering. The story is of a father-in-law who packs his bags and travels many miles to visit his son-in-law. They share a meal together and then have a heart to heart talk. The father-in-law offers some important advice to the younger man that changes his life. The Father-in-law's name is Jethro and the son-in-law is Moses. Their story is found in Exodus Chapter 18. We are going to listen in on their family meeting, and in turn learn some important lessons for our church family.

As you find your place let me remind you that we are now 33 months old. 33 months since our public launch at the Bowl-a-Rama on April 8, 2007. And as we approach our 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary, I want us to consider the question: "Where do we go from here?" To answer that question we need to first figure out where "here" is and then determine where we go from that point.

**Caveat:** But Before I go any further, I want to remind us that our church is not "Pastor led," but led by an elder board, made up of myself, Micah and Allen. Almost everything I am going to share this morning comes out of our weekly meetings. It is an encouragement to me, and I hope it is to you, that LCCC is not a one-man show – but is led by a board with a shared vision. Second, before we begin I want to say that I don't have time to talk about everything in the church that is going on. Some questions and topics will have to be left for a later time. I have tried to sift through everything to bring forward what appears to be the most important issues as we move into 2010.

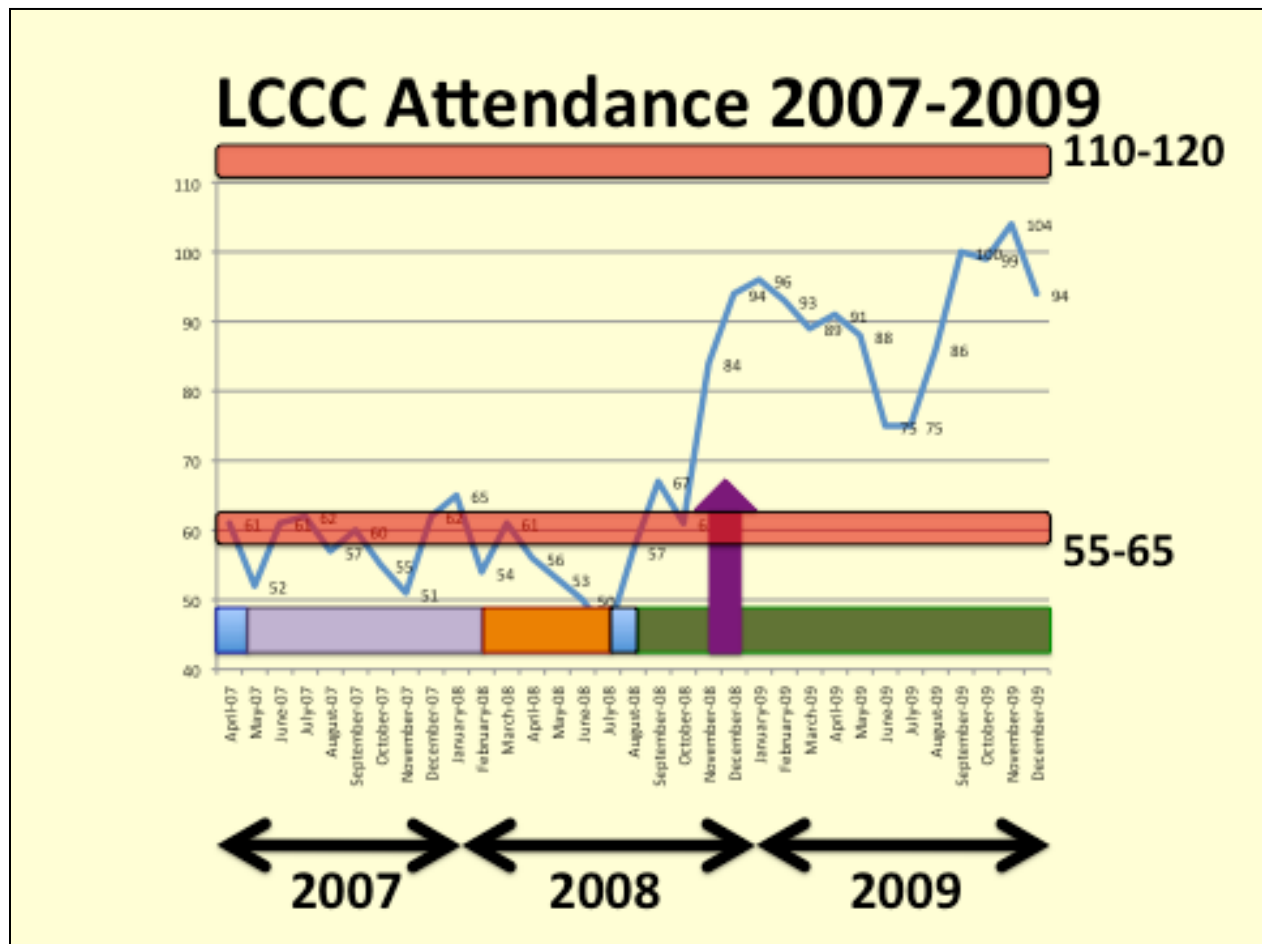
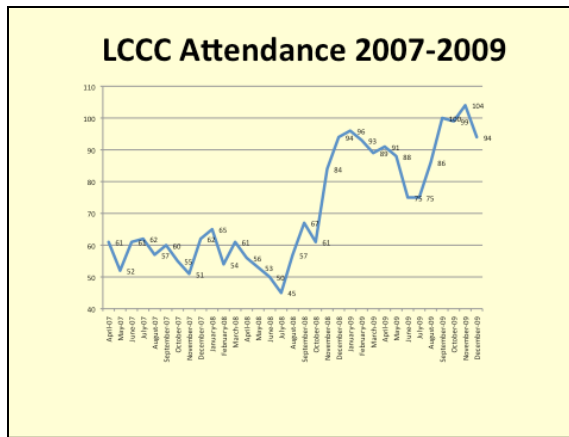
### **What are we at?**

Well, "Where are we at?" Let's look at our text. Exodus 18, verse 1: [Ex. 18:1](#) Now Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. The context is that Moses has led the people out of slavery in Egypt. The news of that great escape has reached the ears of Moses father-in-law, Jethro, a Midianite. Keep in mind that Moses had spent 40 years working for Jethro's after first fleeing Egypt, and married Jethro's daughter, Zipporah. Before Moses returned to Egypt to lead the people, he left his wife and two boys with Jethro. Verse six: [Ex. 18:6](#) Jethro sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law

Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her.” [Ex. 18:7](#) Then Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, and he bowed down and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent. Moses was reunited with his family. They embrace and begin to catch up on all the news they had missed since they had last been together. [Ex. 18:8](#) Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel’s sake, all the hardship that had befallen them on the journey, and *how* the LORD had delivered them. You can imagine how excited Moses must have been to share with his Father-in-law what God had done – conflict with Pharaoh, the plagues, the Passover lamb, the angel of death, the parting of the Red Sea! Verse 9: [Ex. 18:9](#) Jethro rejoiced over all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, in delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians. And in verses 10-11 He continues to praise God. Verse 12 [Ex. 18:12](#) Then Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses’ father-in-law before God. Basically Jethro asks Moses, “How is it going?” And Moses responds “Great! Look at what God has done!” and they all praise God together.

And as we consider where we are at it is appropriate that we likewise rejoice and give praise for what God has done for us in 2009. How He has guided us through challenging times. How God has worked on our behalf. How He has changed lives and answered prayers. We are not tooting our own horn but God’s horn. To not praise Him would be to steal His glory! Let me recount some of the story:

Micah shared a few weeks ago that attendance was up 45% from about 65 in January to an average of 91 / week for the year. We thank the Lord for that growth! Look at this attendance graph. You don’t have to be able to see the details just the trends.



Recall with me our different locations. This blue line represents the time that we were meeting at the bowling alley when we started (2 months). Then we moved to the movie theater (9 months), and to the child-care center (6 months), back to the bowling alley (1 month), and then to this elementary school which we have been at almost a year

and a half. You will note that from July of 2008 to January of 2009 we had a rapid period of growth. Part of that growth was the merging of Grace Fellowship Church which occurred in November / December 2008. In addition, in the study of church growth, the first major attendance barrier that a small church faces is getting above the 55 to 65 people. 80% of church plants do not make it to the third year, because they are not able to get above this line to become self-sustaining. February of 2009 was the first month (since LCCC started) where our income was greater than our expenses. The second attendance threshold for most churches is 110-120, which is about where we are at now. Our high attendance has been 116. We currently have 41 families or individuals who call LCCC home, and if we were all together at the same time, there would be 128 of us. And because of this growth again, as Micah shared, our giving was up 75% over giving in 2008. God has been so good to us! We praise Him for what He has done!

The numbers I am sharing are only important in that they reflect ministry. Our church motto is: Living faith. Changing lives. During 2009 we have seen God do just that. This year four people (two adults / two children) were saved and several others rededicated their lives to the Lord. We baptized three people in 2009 and continued significant involvement in the Rowlett community; particularly with the Rowlett Needy Children's Fund, the Police, Fire and Chamber of Commerce.

What all this illustrates is that we are beginning to make progress on our four purposes. These purposes give us focus and direction. Our four purposes are actually not our purposes, but God's purposes for His church. Pick up any book about church theology and you will find each of these four items in one form or another. We find out value as a church not in how we are different or unique, but in accomplishing what has been given to

all churches.

Therefore it is vital that we all know the purposes of the church, and seek to advance them through our ministry in the church. Let's review. First? Worshiping. Second? Growing. Third? Loving. Fourth? Sharing. Worshiping. Growing. Loving. Sharing. We worship Jesus as King and bow down before Him. We remember what He has done for us, submit to God and obey Him. We grow together in unity and in knowledge and obedience to God. We teach and preach the word as a priority. We do so while loving one another and loving the world around us, taking time to develop relationships. And because we have been given such good news, we seek to share it here, in the surrounding communities and to the ends of the earth.

That simple focus – worshiping, growing, loving and sharing is what we are trying to do at Lake Cities. Mark Twain said, “Put all your eggs in one basket – and watch that basket.” We have one basket with four purposes. And praise God He is helping us to make progress in each one.

As Tammy and I visited family and friends in Arizona they all asked, “How is the church doing?” And I was able to tell them, by God's grace, with God's help – we have much to be thankful for.

### **Where Do we Go From Here?**

So, the next question is, “*where do we go from here?*” Is it time to relax? Whew! We have arrived! Is it time for a new initiative? Where do we go from here? Let's look back at our story. After the reunion, Moses returns to work. Verse 13: [Ex. 18:13](#) **It came about the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the**

morning until the evening. And at the end of the day Jethro asks: [Ex. 18:14](#) “What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit *as judge* and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?” Moses responds, [15](#) “Because the people come to me to inquire of God. [Ex. 18:16](#) “When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws.” Just because they are the people of God, blessed and chosen does not mean they don’t have problems. There is counseling that needs to be done and conflicts that must be addressed. That day-to-day ministry has not changed much in 3,500 years, and neither have the challenges. In verse 17 Jethro says: [“Ex. 18:17](#) “The thing that you are doing is not good. [Ex. 18:18](#) “You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.”

And so in verses 19-23, Jethro tells Moses to appoint qualified people who can join in the ministry and help with the work, verse 22: [Ex. 18:22](#) “Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear *the burden* with you. [Ex. 18:23](#) “If you do this thing and God *so* commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace.”

Jethro is telling Moses, in essence, *to update the infrastructure; to mobilize and reorganize the people*. The processes are not as they should be. Things need to be formalized a little more than they are now. Jethro is saying, “It is great what God has done, but it is time now to take an inside look, or else the encouragement will turn to discouragement and frustration, and the leadership will burn out.”

And that, I believe, **is the important lesson that we need to take to heart.** We have been very outward oriented in our first three years, and that is a good thing, it was necessary and will continue; but it is now time for an inside look. Our infrastructures need to be updated. Our processes are not as clear as they should be. And that has already led to some frustration and burnout, especially for our leaders. Now I am not saying that anyone has done anything wrong. It is an issue of timing. It would have been inappropriate when Moses was parting the Red Sea for someone to have tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Hey, let's reorganize our committees." But now that God has brought us to this point, we must turn our attention to these things. Let me illustrate the problem:

Do you know how many official ministry teams we have? How do you get onto a team? How long do you serve? What is the job of the chairperson? Who do the teams report to? What budget responsibility do they have? *We don't know* (at least not in any consistent manner) because there is currently nothing in writing to provide structure for our ministry teams. It is like trying to put together a new Lego set without the instructions. To support our team leaders, to engage people in meaningful ministry, our team structures need to be clarified

How about for elders and staff? What is the selection process for an elder? We know the biblical standards, but how long do elders serve? Is there a rotation? How are staff hired and evaluated? These are issues normally found in church bylaws. Our bylaws have been in draft form for a while, but now need to be finished. This is not a criticism. Our elder board has only been independent from our planting church for nine months! But it is now time to get those done.

I have been involved in churches, and perhaps you have as well, where the ministry and growth of the church was hindered because of a lack of attention to the internal structures and administrative details. We don't want that to happen here at LCCC.

And so to address these issues, here are some priorities for 2010: (1) Finish church bylaws / policies which will cover both elder / staff and ministry team responsibilities. (2) Continue to move toward establishing a Deacon Board. The Deacon board will oversee administrative, facility, financial and benevolence issues. It will free up the elders to provide more shepherding and engage more people in ministry, just as Jethro advised Moses. (3) Additional Staff help. Caring for 41 families is different than caring for 13 families, yet we have the same basic structure as we had when the church started. Therefore, we have put a paid seminary intern into the 2010 church budget and are considering paid administrative help.

Pastor Andy Stanley wrote: 'Every leader, regardless of the size of his or her church, needs to be thinking about structure, teams, appropriate goals, etc. Creating systems and structures allows us to be a good steward of people. Sometimes I get negative feedback when I talk about systems— "Oh, Andy, you're trying to make the church a business." No, in the beginning God created the first systems. Everything He created is systematic, including our bodies. Systems support growth physically, organizationally, in nature. The systems you inherit, adopt or create will eventually impact what staff and volunteers do.'

## **Application**

There are three areas of application for all of us. First, pray that God would continue to guide our church. Pray for that God would help us to honor him in how the church is

organized. Second, be patient, with us. Changes take time. The elders will need to devote time to make these goals happen, and may therefore move more slowly on other issues. Third, participate. If you are asked to give input to a new policy or to sit on a hiring committee, join a ministry team consider what changing role God might have for you in 2010. Participate as God leads you.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, If LCCC is going to continue to grow and make an impact for Christ, we need to get better organized, so that the internal infrastructure supports and does not suppress God's assignments for us.

You may be aware that migratory birds in the U.S. are tagged by the Department of the Interior with metal strips. The Washington Biological Survey used the abbreviated code on each tag: "Wash. Biol. Sury." However the process was changed and updated after a farmer wrote to the department expressing his frustration. He wrote: "To whom it may concern: I shot one of your birds. My wife followed the cooking instructions attached – she washed it, boiled it and served it. It was the worst thing we ever ate."

We want to avoid, as much as we can, miscommunication and frustration by organizing ourselves with excellence, to God's glory. Amen.