
Pastor's Annual Report

Common Ground Covenant Church

Summer 2009

0.1 Introduction

This being my first “official” report to CGC, I begin by re-capturing a recent metaphor I heard concerning our congregation. In the world of farming, many agricultural products give indication of future crop development long before the time of harvest. Growth can be seen at very early stages. Appropriately noted, this is not how it works with a potato. Being the only Covenant church in Idaho, the potato is a fitting metaphor for our church. The potato grows underground; not really giving much indication of what is taking place under the soil. For the first two years of our church plant, a great deal of Common Ground’s growth developed underground.

Formed as an independent church plant, without financial or organizational backing, our church is analogous to a crop planted in drought. Captured in the image a recent movie, *Faith Like Potatoes*, CG grew under difficult circumstances. The question of our future, with recent commitment and support from the Evangelical Covenant Church is how will our church respond as a contributor of the global Church in both service and evangelism? Over the next few years, CGC will need to define its hopes, dreams, and expectations as a disciple making church contributing to global mission.

1. Word & Sacrament

Essential to the identity of CGC, is the commission we have received from God to announce to the world the great things he has done in and through Jesus Christ. By proclaiming Jesus as Lord, we summon the inhabitants of our world to become part of a covenant family working towards the chief end of world redemption.

As part of my report, three non-negotiable convictions will be briefly discussed as essential to my pastoral office: preaching the Word, administering of the Sacraments, and a sustaining practice of personal obedience. A pastor’s ministry may become more than this, but it should never become less.

By repeatedly retelling the story of Jesus, our church reclaims our narrative framework. The mission and message of Jesus sets the stage for our task as God’s image bearers. Quite honestly, the most significant goal I have in this report is to emphasize the resurgence of interest we are experiencing in our community for the Word of God. For whatever reason, we have underemphasized this point in the past. I think as we move forward, without apology of reservation, we need to emphasize ourselves as a biblical church. Our interpretations and diversity may provide a certain freedom, but inherent to the mission of who we are, we are a people of the Word.

Personally, in my daily office, I believe no other rhythm or practice takes precedence to my study and sermon preparation. In listening to the voice of God in Holy Scripture, my call as pastor to proclaim God’s Word is accomplished. Thankful for the administrative help I have

received this past year, and to the countless people serving in a variety of other ministries, I believe we are making substantial progress in this area. I am honored to be your pastor and to minister God's Word before you.

In addition to our commitment to the Word, I believe we are in the process of recapturing a deeper sense of significance for the Sacraments in our church. The Sacraments speak a language and tell our story in profound and mysterious ways. Celebrating baptism and communion at CGC provides a platform for discipleship that will challenge a new generation.

Baptism speaks to our being connected to a story much larger than ourselves. Regardless of one's church tradition, the Sacrament of baptism provides a witness concerning identity and inclusion within Christ's family. Baptism requires less of me, and more of Jesus. Our outward symbol of baptism may vary, but inwardly we are being united by our individual commitments.

Communion testifies to the saving grace of Jesus in our lives. I believe our weekly table fellowship gives witness to the universality of God's grace. In coming to the table, we celebrate our equal standing before God. In a world filled with performance standards and value judgments, the Sacrament of communion testifies to us God's grace. At this juncture in our history, I see our continued commitment to the Lord's table as an essential witness of the future direction of our church.

Within story and symbol we are developing space for sacred practice. Discipleship must involve a tangible ethic. Our Church cannot view obedience as a solely individual moral agenda. CGC needs to speak to our larger social context. In a world filled with corporations, superpowers, and individuals who have acted outside of moral standards fitting of creation, our church must set an agenda for global obedience to God's created order. We must learn to cooperate with groups and institutions that are working towards these goals. As CGC moves forward, learning to be in the world, but not of the world, will become a central theme for our ministry together.

Admittedly, the best step forward is shared fellowship with God. Too often, however, our workweek and countless other responsibilities stand in the way. I have sensed that we feel like CGC always need to be doing something new at our church. We long for a deep sense of friendship with God, but put off Sabbath that leads to this life. Sabbath seems like wasted time; time that could have been spent doing something else. We forfeit God's grace in our life for a pursuit of productivity. May we begin this next leg of our journey together by desperately asking Jesus to give us ears to hear and hearts to listen for this sacred space.

The Church of our time does not lack a love affair with the imagination of greatness. The routine circumstances of ordinary life do not provide the stimulus we desire to feel productive. Learning to see God's activity in the mundane subplot of our daily ministries is central to our vocational calling. Humbling as it may be at times, we need to be continually reminded of our dependence on others; both past and present. I have no doubt that CGC will experience tremendous growth and changes this next year, my hope and desire is for us to gain shared fellowship with God.

2. Intentional Leadership Development

I have had a number of people mention to me that CGC tends to attract Christians who feel burned-out by church. In many ways, we are like a hospital for wounded Christians. The thing about hospitals, they are meant to release their patients, not help them establish residency.

In our region of the country, I think it safe to say that many people in our area have grown up in church. Even more note worthy, many of us are now somewhere around the age of 35. Taking this into account, I would bet that many people at CGC have tucked away very pleasant memories of past days in youth group. During days filled with countless activities, several of us probably had some kind of life changing experience. Often, this is where we encountered Jesus for the first time.

Youth group touched many people in deep and meaningful ways. That is, until we got a little older and perhaps started feeling hurt by the adults who ran it. Perhaps someone in your past has disappointed you, perhaps you were a disappointment to someone else. Either way, many of us learned that youth group was meant to come to an end.

My point is this, under all the superficial images so many people have when they think of church, there is a truth about Jesus that has apprehend us. This is what I find to be true of so many people at CGC; Jesus has transformed us! Despite some major disappointments, we realize that the mission and message of Jesus needs to move forward.

I am speaking from personal experience when I say, I am tired of reading books telling me what is wrong with the church. Believe me, I have read my share of deconstructive books about the church. I want to know how we plan to fix this problem. I say this with all humility, I think to many people in this church are still holding onto youth group. We want those pleasant memories of life, faith, and those all expense paid summer retreats.

Having had many recent and productive conversations with our leadership team, it has occurred to many of us that everyone on the team is currently over 50 years old. I love our over 50 leadership team members, but I am now speaking to the young people of this church when I say, it is time to emerge. In many ways, this church is running like a youth group. Most of our leadership, primary financial givers, and change agents are the same people who have been doing this for the past twenty-five years. It is time for young leaders at CGC to step forward, and it is time for the seasoned leaders at CGC to help groom their future leadership.

I do not think we will see turn over of the entire Leadership Team in just one year, perhaps this will take time, but we have to start grooming young leaders in this church or we will keep perpetuating the same problem the church has been facing for years; which is a steady decline in young members.

3. Spiritual Health

Lord willing, three years is a brief introduction to the history of CGC. I have often wondered what it will be like many years from now when a newcomer comes to CGC and reads our infamous "history" section in our future brochure. How many paragraphs will these first few years take up? I think the first few years will be mentioned briefly, because of all of

the incredible ministry that is yet to take place in and through this church.

A healthy view of the past means we learn from our mistakes and celebrate our successes. We can pick up and dust off where needed to move ahead with our primary mission. CGC is all about Jesus! Since before the day the doors opened and the first prayer was made, before the guitars were tuned and the chords were strummed, the sermons preached, the service projects promoted, the camps planned, the relationships formed, the books read, the meetings held, and all the other myriad of things that have gone into getting a church plant to work... CGC has always been about knowing Jesus Christ, promoting His Kingdom, and living out an authentic vision of Church in our community. The mission & message of Jesus!

I have said this before, and I will say it again, "every bit of time, energy, money, and service that has gone into this church has been worth it." If CGC were to close its doors tomorrow, I would still praise God! Why? Simply because I know that the people God has brought into this church look more like Jesus today than we did three years ago. We are growing in compassion, mercy and justice and God is honoring our journey. We are growing in the grace of Jesus Christ. Amen, hallelujah! This church has tasted the mission.

A brief introduction... that is what the past three years needs to be! We still have a long road ahead of us. In a world filled with increasing economic problems, globalization concerns, moral collapse in all areas of society, and an ever growing shadow of pessimism sweeping much of life, we battle daily struggles. Power, possession, and pleasures; we are all looking for a fix. Desperate, depressed, and disappointed; that is where we end up. Has there ever been a time in history when the world did not need Jesus more? Church, it is time to move forward!

In this next year, I would like to see CGC find a more secure location, double in attendance, and increase our volunteer staff. I think these are realistic goals. God willing, I even think we could begin to look at hiring an additional staff member. We're going to need new leaders, increased financial commitments, improved communication and even more intentional evangelism.

It is going to take a community effort to see this church grow. I believe it is not a matter of whether God wants this or not, it is a matter of our faithfulness to the commission he has placed upon us. We all know it is not just a matter of size and numbers; it is about the substance of the ministry. That is what excites me about CGC, we are still all about Jesus. Only now, we are moving forward with a little experience under our belt.

I truly believe that within a few years, we will be planting another church out of CGC in this Valley. It is what we are called to do, continually spreading the ministry of Jesus. I believe that CGC is on its way to making a significant contribution to the Church universally. We are but one body, but the world has never seen a force quite like a commitment of local congregations working together to save the world in the name of our Lord. This is exciting... let's get back to work.