2020 VISION PLAN

A 5-Year Guide for the Church's Future

Dr. Mark L. Richardson

From the Lead Pastor for Preaching and Vision

It has been a great privilege and sobering responsibility to serve our church family for ten years. I have been thinking about where we were back in 2009, what the Lord has taken us through 2019, and what we should focus on as we begin a new decade in 2020.

The church is composed of people whom God has ordained to be His before the foundation of the world (cf. Eph. 1:4, 5; Rom. 8:29, 30; Rev. 13:8; 17:8). As a local church, we are the body of Christ, engaged in fulfilling the mandate of our Lord Jesus: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18–20).

The following 2020 Vision Plan is the first of its kind and is our guide for the next five years. I have consulted with staff members individually and as a group. We face significant challenges and sweeping changes in society. We must be ready to meet these challenges and recognize emerging threats and opportunities. In order to navigate today's turbulent waters and complex issues, we must do some things differently and not change a thing in other areas. We need to improve ministry when we can be more Biblical in our approach. In order to fulfill our mission, this means we must:

- Increase church member participation in evangelism and Bible in-take
- Better leverage Home Group and Community Group ministries
- Improve other existing ministries; seek God for new ones
- Move to a Family Ministry Model rather than maintaining a Traditional Youth Model

This 2020 Vision Plan is not all encompassing. It doesn't speak to every area of the church, nor everything we will do. But it better integrates Biblical ministry model(s), focuses on addressing threats to the local church, and sets clear direction for the future of the church body. My prayer is that this guide would unite us even more in order to better fulfill the mission God has given us and increase His glory in the church, in the neighborhoods, and in the nations.

Yours for fulfilling our mission,

Mark Richardson

Dr. Mark L. Richardson

21st Century Ministry in a Post-Christian Culture

The modern "mood" of our post-Christian environment has been described as "modern chauvinism." What this means is that old, ancient ideas are immediately considered outdated and inherently irrelevant. The modern mind cannot tolerate spiritual realities and a God who raises the dead. High schools, colleges, and universities promote anti-supernatural, materialistic ideologies. Another aspect of this "modern chauvinism" is systemic suspicion of authority figures and structures such as national borders, police, lawmakers, civil laws, moral laws, husbands, and pastors/elders. Progressives seek to de-construct and redefine each authority role and structure.

The local church will have to become more agile, innovative, and resilient to deal effectively with the following threats. The increasingly complex, interconnected, and societal nature of these threats also underscores the importance of continuing in and advancing Biblical doctrine and values to build up both the home and the church.

Existing and Emerging Threats to the Church and Families

Individualism. The individualist denies that anybody other than the individual has a rightful say in how the individual conducts himself. Individualism recognizes that the only crime which occurs is the violation of an individual's supposed sovereignty.

Selfish Assertiveness. This idea reveals itself in bold communications or actions to others of the person's right to do what they feel will bring delight to themselves. It can be seen in both aggressive and passive-aggressive ways.

Absolute Moral Relativism. The idea that denies we can possess any objective knowledge, or any ultimate realities (like God), or that there are any moral absolutes.

Therefore, meaning and truth are relative to each person, culture, situation, relationship and outcome.

Deism. God created the world and watches it from a distance, allowing its "natural laws" to run their course.

Pragmatism. The doctrine that practical consequences are the criteria of truth, meaning and value. If the bottom line is more people in the church, it must be "good." Lights. Camera. Fog machine!

Hedonism. The purpose in life is to find and experience pleasure.

Religious Legalism. The idea that obedience to laws or moral codes are means of gaining God's favor and/or maintaining God's favor.

Naturalism. The natural universe (composed of energy and matter and based on natural laws) is the sum total of reality. This view rejects absolute values. Ethical judgments are seen as "the way things naturally are." It maintains that humans can attain particular knowledge about God through human reason by observing the created order.

Chance. Events in life are determined by randomness or chance, not God.

Fate. Events are determined by an impersonal force or forces (also called determinism), not a personal God.

Liberalism. A movement in the 19th and 20th century Protestant circles that holds to the idea that Christianity is reconcilable with the positive human aspirations, including the quest for autonomy. It adapts religion to modern thought and culture, but in doing so the system undermines God's Word.

Pluralism. The belief that there are many equally valid paths to God, and expressions of truth about God.

Dualism. The existence of two opposite and opposing realities of good and evil. A modified Christian dualism acknowledges the battle between God and the devil. God ultimately wins the final outcome, but He also can lose sometimes during the conflict.

Atheism. The belief that there is no God; He does not exist.

Pantheism. All is God. Creation does not have a real existence in itself but is only part of God.

Biblical Illiteracy

In addition to these threats, there is an increase of Biblical illiteracy within the local church. A recent LifeWay Research study found only 45 percent of those who regularly attend church read the Bible more than once a week. Over 40 percent of the people attending read their Bible occasionally, maybe once or twice a month. Almost 1 in 5 churchgoers say they never read the Bible—essentially the same number who read it every day.

Our lack of biblical literacy has led to a lack of biblical doctrine. LifeWay Research found that 1 in 5 evangelical Christians believe there are many ways to get to heaven. More than half of evangelicals (59 percent) believe the Holy Spirit is a force and not a personal being—in contrast to the orthodox biblical teaching of the Trinity being three Persons in one God. As a whole, many Christians, hold unbiblical views on hell, sin, salvation, Jesus, humanity, and the Bible itself.

So, a strategic way to combat these trends is to go *bigger* on the Bible, not less. To help combat the trend, I've created a five-year Sunday preaching plan that will expose a sixth-grader to *all* of God's Word by the time he or she is a sophomore.

2020-2024 PREACHING PLAN

2020

January		February		March		April	
5	Acts 5	2	Acts 9	1	Acts 13	5	Acts 18
12	Acts 6	9	Acts 10	8	Acts 14	12	Acts 19
19	Acts 7	16	Acts 11	15	Acts 15	19	Acts 20
26	Acts 8	23	Acts 12	22	Acts 16	26	Acts 21
				29	Acts 17		

May		June		July		August	
3	Acts 22	7	Acts 27	5	Genesis	2	Matthew
10	Acts 23	14	Acts 28	12		9	
17	Acts 24	21	Acts Summary	19		16	
24	Acts 25	28	Acts Summary	26		23	
31	Acts 26					30	

September		October		November		December	
6	Exodus	4	Mark	1	Leviticus	6	Luke-Acts
13		11		8		13	
20		18		15		20	
27		25		22		27	
				29			

2021

January		February		March		April	
3	Numbers	7	John	7	Deuteronomy	4	Resurrection
10		14		14		11	
17		21		21		18	
24		28		28		25	
31							

May		June		July		August	
2	Romans	6	Joshua	4	Judges	1	1/2 Corinthians
9		13		11		8	
16		20		18		15	
23		27		25		22	
30						29	

September		October		November		December	
5	Ruth	3	Galatians	7	1/2 Samuel	5	Incarnation
12		10		14		12	
19		17		21		19	
26		24		28		26	
		31					

2022

January		February		March		April	
2	Hebrews/James	6	Psalms	6	1/2 Peter	3	Resurrection
9		13		13		10	
16		20		20		17	
23		27		27		24	
30							

May		June		July		August	
1	Proverbs	5	Mark	3	Ecclesiastes	7	1/2/3 John
8		12		10		14	
15		19		17		21	
22		26		24		28	
29				31			

September		October		November		December	
4	Song of Songs	2	Jude/Revelation	6	Isaiah	4	Incarnation
11		9		13		11	
18		16		20		18	
25		23		27		25	
		30					

2023

January		February		March		April	
1	Daniel	5	Joel/Amos	5	Ezekiel	2	Resurrection
8		12		12		9	
15		19		19		16	
22		26		26		22	
29						29	

May		June		July		August	
7	Nahum/Obadiah	4	Hosea	2	Jonah/Micah	6	Habbakuk/Zephaniah
14		11		9		13	
21		18		16		20	
28		25		23		27	
				30			

September		October		November		December	
3	Haggai/Zechariah	1	Jeremiah/Lamentations	5	Malachi	3	Incarnation
10		8		12		10	
17		15		19		17	
24		22		26		24	
		29				31	

2024

January		February		March		April	
7	Ephesians/Colossians	4	1/2 Kings	3	Philippians	3	Resurrection
14		11		10		10	
21		28		17		17	
28		25		24		24	
				31			

May		June		July		August	
5	1/2 Chronicles	2	1/2 Timothy	7	Ezra/Nehemiah	4	1/2 Thessalonians
12		9		14		11	
19		16		21		18	
26		23		28		25	
29		30					

September		October		November		December	
1	Esther	6	Titus/Philemon	3	Job	1	Incarnation
8		13		10		8	
15		20		17		15	
22		27		24		22	
29		30				29	

The Post-Enlightenment: *"Honey, I Shrunk the Gospel!"*

The post-Enlightenment's influence on theology in the western world has influenced all of us to see the Bible through the lenses of what the post-Enlightenment values: reason, individualism, skepticism, and science. To put it simply, there was a fundamental shift in how people thought and how they approached the Bible. Man's reason was promoted above God's revelation (i.e., the Bible). The post-Enlightenment affects the seminaries, the seminaries affect the pastors, which in turn affects church members. The result is that the Gospel has been shrunk and/or flattened into little gospels. For example:

The gospel of Fire Insurance. The Gospel has been reduced to a "get out of jail free" card, or "fire insurance" with little or no call for repentance or surrender to the authority of the Lord Jesus. Rather, the goal in evangelism is to get people to "pray the prayer of salvation." When they do, they are told they are saved and going to heaven. But where do you find that in the teaching of Jesus or His apostles?

The gospel of Personal Therapy. This is seen in an *excessive* focus on the self, one's problems, "finding oneself" or the psychological health of the person. To be sure, Jesus came that we might have abundant life. But Jesus came to fix *the whole world*. Literally. God's kingdom will overthrow and overrule all other earthly powers. Therefore, an excessive focus on the self and being apolitical (having no interest or involvement in political affairs) is to get the Gospel wrong from the start. To be anti-political (reaction against or rejection of political involvement) is to get the Gospel wrong from the beginning.

The gospel of Moralism. Moralism reduces the Gospel to improvements in behavior, and those rules are set by the moralist involving alcohol, gambling, dancing, rated "R" movies, tattoos, women wearing pants, etc. *ad nauseum.* Moralism promises salvation to sinners if they will only behave and commit themselves to moral improvement. But the gospel of morality saves no one. It only produces self-righteousness people in the church.

Additionally, post-Enlightenment thinking is suspect of supernaturalism. Therefore, major supernatural realities of the Gospel, such as God's divine council composed of heavenly beings created and assigned by God to help administer the affairs of the nations, is unknown, suspect, or discounted as peripheral to the Big Bible Story of the Gospel (cf. Gen. 1:26; 11:7; Deut. 32:8-9; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; 1 Kings 22:19-40; Dan. 10; Lk. 20:36; Eph. 6; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:5; 4:4;). However, the divine council is part of the Big Bible Story of God's Gospel.

We need to re-think how to better combat Biblical illiteracy within the church, and how to better strengthen families according to more Biblical models of ministry.

"A 50-year failed experiment."

That's how Scott T. Brown, a once-prominent figure in the youth ministry movement, describes youth ministry. Is Brown being too negative? Maybe — if our purpose is to gather young people and entertain them in "safe" Christian environments until they leave home.

But if the goal is to grow the next generation of disciples and church leaders, then youth ministry is an experiment that has largely failed in America.

Not only are young people de-churching in droves (anywhere between 60 and 85 percent after they turn 18), they are not re-churching after getting married and having children as in previous generations. Some who stay in the church tend to develop less orthodox views about the faith and moral behaviors.

Churches have built youth centers, hired youth ministers, developed youth programs, provided youth activities, sponsored youth camps, and offered worship services for youth by youth, all the while youth leave the local church in record numbers, and parents and church leaders scratch their heads wondering why and what's to be done.

Why is this occurring? Well, with all things related to what we do in the church, where is the traditional model of youth ministry found in the Bible? It's not there.

This has led former leaders and champions of traditional youth ministry to re-evaluate the entire model, and propose better, biblical models to disciple youth.

A former professor of evangelism and student ministry has said, *"The generation of teens today is not only the largest, it is also the most fatherless. We must connect students to the larger church and not function as a para-church ministry within a church building. Students need older believers in their lives. We need a Titus 2 revolution where older men teach younger guys and older women teach younger ladies."*

At the same time, it is essential for parents to accept the primary responsibility of discipling their children.

Deuteronomy 6:6–7 says, "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." Regarding their children, Paul told the fathers of the Ephesian church, "Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

A role of the church is to encourage fathers and mothers in the high calling of parenthood and disciple them so that they can disciple their children in the faith. Changes are needed to fulfill this purpose.

3 Main Family Ministry Models

Family Integrated Model
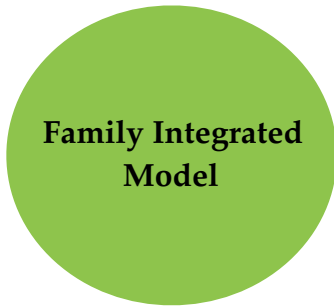
The Family Integrated Model removes all age-graded ministry to preschoolers, children and teenagers. This model encourages families to worship together, fathers to lead and disciple their families, and children to be involved in all aspects of the church alongside their family (e.g., missions, discipleship, worship, giving, prayer, etc).
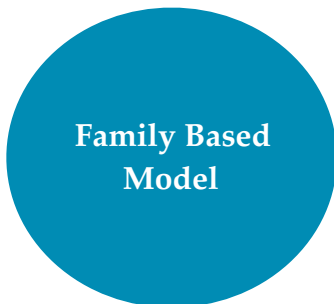
Family Based Model

The Family Based Model keeps preschool, children and youth ministry segments in the church led by paid pastors or ministers and caring adult volunteers (which might be parents), but offers many intergenerational opportunities for families to engage together. This model is probably the most prevalent among family ministry models in America. However, one problem with this model is that no matter how much we want parents to be spiritually involved with their students, the parents usually still see the student pastor or minister as the primary discipler of their children. Many believing parents do not see themselves qualified to teach or disciple themselves, much less their children.

Family Equipping Model
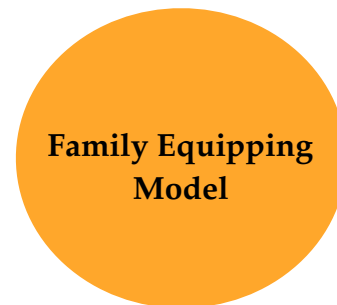
The Family Equipping Model keeps preschool, children and youth ministry segments in the church but encourages parents to lead the vast majority of these areas. The paid staff and adult, non-parenting volunteers are there to help minister to those with a single parent in the home or to those without parents. They equip, coach, encourage, and guide the parents as they disciple their children.

This model puts parents in their proper place as the primary spiritual leaders of their children. It allows the church and its ministries to build stronger families among Christian households and embrace spiritual orphans.

We may adopt one of these models or, most likely, an adaptation of one or two.

Savoring and Spreading the Gospel

We usually don't spread good news unless we savor the news. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the best news this world has ever heard: not the gospels of fire insurance, moralism, personal therapy, or a view of the Gospel that is suspect of the supernatural. How can we move forward in the next decade to increase church member participation in spreading the Gospel? The following are some practical ideas:

"Who's Your One?" is a simple evangelism strategy. You seek God to win one person to Christ in a year. Actually, it's nine months, not counting the summer. Our first attempt at this yielded 56% of the church membership participating. How can we improve member participation?

Evangelism Training *Quick Hits.* What is this? It is a monthly, 5-7 minute evangelism training conducted in the first Sunday morning worship service of each month.

Evangelism Classes or Seminars. The following are classes or seminars we have in mind. These can be conducted with adults and youth on Wednesday nights, during Sunday morning Community Group time, or even as the rest of the church worships during Sunday morning service:

- *How to Set Up a Great Commission Wall in Your Home*
- *How to Study the Bible as a Family*
- *How to Proclaim the Gospel as a Family*
- *How to Disciple Your Family and Others*
- *How to Love Your Neighbors*
- *How to Use Social Media to Spread the Gospel*
- *How to Engage in a Gospel Conversation*

Offer Evangelism Opportunities. It's one thing to train, it's another to go out and do it! The following are what we have in mind:

- Mall witnessing with the 3 Circles Gospel presentation
- The Family Fall Carnival
- Parking Meter Evangelism (pay for someone's parking meter and leave a letter stating why (because of the Gospel!)
- Conduct a "Church at the Lake" 30 minute service at Stuart Creek Park in April and one in September. Hot dogs! Water! Live music! Gospel message!

Take Advantage of City-wide Events. Why don't we share free water or hot cocoa and the Gospel at these events?

- *Liberty by the Lake*
- *American Heroes*
- *Holiday in the Park*

In the first staff meeting of this year, we went over the three W's as we looked back at 2018. The three W's are 1) What went well?, 2) What went wrong?, and 3) What needs to change? These are good questions to help produce alignment to the mission and improvement to it. I discovered two things as we discussed together. First, for the first "W," each staff member shared things that they thought went well *in their own respective area.* Second, when it came to "What went wrong?" each staff member shared what they thought went wrong *in someone else's area*! Do you know what that's called? Human nature! For this 2020 Vision Plan I used the SWOT analysis with the staff: **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats. I told them that I should be the first one in each category! The following is the staff's remarks, unedited, for each category. What would you say for each?

Strengths:
Music
Expository preaching
Family feeling
Student and children ministries
Financial giving
The size of church property
Low debt
Longevity of the church
Administrative assistant
Service of members
Staff camaraderie
Global missions

Weaknesses:
Lack of commitment to discipleship
Church's name
Facilities
Legalism
Family feeling, fail to notice others
Commitment wanes
Financial giving
Follow up
Failing to prioritize church
Lack of passion for the things of God
Location
Publicity

Opportunities:

The city's growth
Our presence in the community
Physical location
Web, social media
Global foot print
We have the opportunity to improve how we do ministry

Threats:
Location, near mega-churches
People's consumeristic view of the church
Satan and evil powers
Society's extra-curricular activities
Pace of society
Pursuit of the American dream
Political threats
School's influence, progressivism
Biblical illiteracy
Social media
Gossip
Breakdown of the family