**** **Spring 2023 Quarterly Newsletter**

**April 2023**

Dear Northside Family,

Greetings to all of our regular attenders in person and online and all of our visitors, missionaries, and friends from other parts of the nation and world! My apologies for basically skipping the winter Newsletter. I didn’t have a lot of new information to share with you since our Annual Business Meeting was on January 25, 2023, so it seemed redundant to write a newsletter. But now I have several exciting updates to share with you!

I trust you are keeping up with the national and international news. If anything, it should make us hunger and thirst for Jesus’ return more than ever! Nonetheless, operating under the premise that we still have much Kingdom work to do and accomplish, we march forward in faith.

For Northside specifically, a major focus of 2023 is discipleship. To this day, it still fascinates me how Jesus changed the world starting with just 12 leaders. A major principle of discipleship is multiplication. Get a handful of people that truly love Jesus, are committed to Him and His Kingdom in every way, and they will soon win over other people that truly love Jesus and are committed to Him and His Kingdom in every way; and so on, and so on!

Northside now has a really amazing core of about 120 adults and kids that attend Northside fairly regularly. That is enough that we often hear people say that they don’t know everyone! On the one hand, it is not humanly possible for any of us to really know many more than 10-20 people in our life. Even Jesus, the Son of God, focused on just 12! On the other hand, He had thousands that followed Him, and the early church quickly developed an additional system of meeting house-to-house so that quality fellowship and discipleship could continue in a more personal setting.

Therefore, we began, and are continuing, our *Dinners/Dessert/Snacks for 8* monthly fellowship times to assist with all of the needs previously described. The groups actually change each month so that we can all better get to know one other. Eventually, if you attend all of the ones you are assigned to, you will meet everyone in the church at least once. The only exception would be new people that continue to join us during the year, but we do get them into the rotation as soon as they desire as well. These get togethers foster deeper discipleship as we are better able to know and meet the needs of all of our fellow congregants. If you are local, or you own a helicopter or airplane and can fly in each month, and you want to be a part of this ministry let us know!

**Vision**

We have better solidified our short and long-term vision into some specific phases. The details of those phases are too extensive for a newsletter and probably way more detail than you would each care to know! However, allow me to present the overall “end game” as that usually helps all of us understand what we are doing, and why we are doing it, in the steps that we are.

Eventually, if the Lord tarries and He doesn’t direct us otherwise, picture our campus as follows:

1. Our current Fellowship Hall will have three larger classrooms, a fourth additional STEM/Art classroom, the toddler area, the larger meeting area, and four office/staff areas. These will all serve the preschool, Sunday school (all ages), and Kidz church. How will we do all of this? The preschool offices and church/preschool finance offices will eventually be in Dr. Roth’s, Pastor Cali’s, and Pastor Kathe’s current office complex. Pastor Randy and Karen’s office will eventually be moved to the north storage room so that their current office can be opened to the room just east of it to make one larger classroom. The current kitchen will be converted to a STEM/Art classroom but will still retain sinks, countertop microwave, and refrigerators for servicing larger church events/banquets and preschool needs.
2. At some point, the current small west-side building (formerly known as the youth building) will become a central campus kitchen and three or four cubicle church offices. Dr. and Mrs. Roth, Pastor Cali, Pastor Brianna, and Pastor Jason will utilize these offices.
3. The current empty lot on our north side will be utilized as parking expansion and an expanded playground/recreational space. This will allow us to eventually add services on Sunday morning and maybe even Saturday night someday. While the natural thought would be to question why more parking is needed if we simply add more services at different times, it must be remembered that people are arriving and going at the same time or staying and overlapping with Sunday School (and vice-a-versa), etc. There is really no realistic way to avoid overlap of people coming and going during the same time periods, so those cars have to go somewhere! And in order to maintain our smallness and closeness, we actually want this overlap so that families can connect with each other, even if they attend different services.
4. Eventually, at the point that we max out this facility and site, we will then search for a second sight to expand our Sunday services and many Christian discipleship/educational opportunities. Note that this is a bit of a change as we had previously talked about building another structure on the north lot. But for several reasons, we are abandoning that likelihood. If you are wondering if this means that we are contemplating a future Christian school, the answer is “possibly” – all options are on the table as God leads. Assuming you are following the news, Florida is on the verge of offering a universal scholarship ($8,000 per year) to any Florida K-12 student to be used at any school, including Christian schools! In essence, this is a voucher system that many of us have been championing and praying about for decades. It will make a strong Christian-based academic and disciplined education free of charge to the vast majority of parents in Florida. This means the valid argument of the past, that all of the disadvantaged kids would land up in the government schools, will no longer apply for the overwhelming majority of Florida kids because the voucher will allow most to attend the school of their parent’s choice. And unbeknownst to many, there are additional scholarship funds available, increasing annually, to even assist students with learning disabilities in attending schools of their choice that develop programs of education and integration specifically for them.

We haven’t made any decisions or promises along these lines for our future, and we are not saying this is or isn’t God’s will for us down the line. That is a decision we would all need to pray through and seek for God’s clear direction. We just felt it prudent to back off the idea of constructing any more buildings on our current site as there really is no more room to expand once we add parking and recreational space. Parking is almost always a major overlooked need when it comes to current growth and facility expansion. And we especially do not have the space for a K-12 school on this site, nor would we want one right across the street from a government school we are trying to impact and support for the Kingdom of God. So, our current focus is to steward what God has given us right now. We will maximize the facilities we do have, make them as efficient as possible, and disciple the people and kids that God brings our way! While it may not look like it much yet, there is a lot of foundational planning, training, and work going on behind the scenes for a future preschool ministry. Your continued prayers are vital!

Overall, ALL of our property will be very “multi-purpose” in function. Yes, many ministries will be sharing the same rooms at different times of the week. And yes, it will necessitate staff to facilitate these many uses and transitions. And yes, there will be growing pains, and mistakes made, and moments of scheduling conflicts. But most importantly, we must all keep our eye and excitement on the vision - it will be a hopping and happening place for Jesus!

Is this a big, audacious goal? For us, yes. But for Jesus, no! When will it all happen? As God provides the funds. I know it all sounds impossible to do debt free, but we serve a God who specializes in miracles – in HIS time. So, all we have to do is listen to Him, be faithful and sacrificial in our giving, and let it come to fruition as He enables us to do so.

While many upgrades and their associated costs are still forthcoming, I feel reasonably safe to say that we already have around half of the funds we need toward getting the preschool opened. Because of our income surpluses last year and this year so far, and money specifically given for building upgrades and the preschool, we are already in the process of starting around $50,000 of upgrades – all debt free! This includes getting our entire facility on the city sewer system, building a preschool themed playground, completing the east classroom upgrades, installing several related infrastructure needs, and continuing our zoning and permitting processes for the preschool itself. To be fair, all of these upgrades are needed for the church’s growth and needs regardless of the preschool vision.

So, if you were doing the math and reading carefully, you probably caught that this first $50,000 is estimated to be about half of what we need. In order to then complete the expected specific preschool upgrades we will need to raise another $50,000 above and beyond our normal budgeted income. I remain optimistic that God will allow us to pull that off before the fall of 2024 (our target date to open the preschool) – “but even if not” (remember my Daniel 3 sermon!), we will keep chipping away at the goal and remain committed to NOT going into debt and finish it in God’s timing! It’s fun doing things God’s way!!

The actual plan is broken down into over 20 phases/steps, and we will attack each step with the old adage about how to eat an elephant – “one bite at a time!” Once the preschool is open, the next round of steps/phases will be aimed at creating the centralized kitchen and church offices in the west building. The last phase would then be to revamp the applicable areas in the fellowship hall to create the third larger classroom and the fourth STEM/Art classroom. However, the order of the steps may sometimes change as God directs and supplies in different ways, so don’t get too concerned if it looks like we are taking steps out of order!

Please also allow me to address the concern that I am sure some are thinking right now: “Are we just aiming to be another big church?” Physically speaking, that is not even an option on this property. We must work within the property limits that God has given us. But even philosophically, if we could build bigger, God has not called us to be a “mega” church. I am a firm believer that once a church gets to a certain size, it is time to start another church! We desire to maintain our “smallness” and multi-generational congregation while at the same time growing to the point that we can do all that God calls us to do. Hopefully we will continue to grow to that point. But at the same time, we will persist to do things that maintain our friendliness and loving community.

The more important issue in our vision is to focus on the specific and unique calling that God has put on Northside – a regional teaching center focused on Biblical literacy and discipleship, all to better empower us to DO ministry.

**Financial Update**

As already alluded to, God continues to be good (no surprise!). Northside finished the first quarter (Jan-Mar) almost $13,000 ahead of our expected/budgeted income to date – total income in quarter one was over $62,000. That also allowed us to increase our missions and outreach contributions to over $7,000 to date. That is over 12% of our income thus far, exceeding our goal of 10%! Thank you all for your faithfulness.

**Food for Thought**

As we grow, there are a couple of potential future issues I want to address. My heart is to always, as best as possible, be proactive and make sure we understand good Biblical procedures up front. From past experience in several different organizations, it isn’t too difficult to foresee forthcoming concerns that could surface as we expand. Allow me to expound on a few.

First, we have several staff and volunteers now serving in pastoral and service positions. From an organizational standpoint, this means the function of our board is shifting more to the “big picture” things – policy, overall vision, financial oversight, etc. while the pastors, staff, and directors are taking on more of the day-to-day operational and functional ministry tasks. That means we all must recognize each of their areas of calling and responsibility and encourage them in those specific ministries. Our role (Sandy and I) is also shifting to more of a mentorship and oversight function, especially to the pastors and staff. By all means we will stay connected to everyone in the church personally, but it also means we will aim to allow each of our pastors, staff, and volunteers to seek God and do the things that s/he senses God is leading in his/her area of responsibility. In other words, our job is to **not** micro-manage.

To that end, it will be incumbent upon all of us to share our ideas, critiques, suggestions, etc. with the right person initially. That can be difficult for two reasons. One, in a small church, it is normal to always take everything to the lead pastors and/or board members. And two, it is human nature to always want to go right to the top to “get things done.” But my heart is to really foster and implement the Biblical model of championing the priesthood of ALL believers. All parts of our pastoral staff and volunteers are equal in importance but different in function. And each of them are independently and corporately responsible to hear from God and lead in their roles of ministry. Most importantly, all of them desire your input, feedback, ideas, suggestions, insights, etc., even when you see a potential problem.

In fact, to support our desire for proactive leadership, as we grow it will be even more important upon you to share things God puts on your heart with the right pastor, staff, or volunteer person, when you sense the need to do so, with love and respect. As I always tell people when talking to others, the worst they can do is say, “no!” In other words, don’t fall into the current cultural trap of being easily offended. And if the pastor/staff/volunteer doesn’t implement your idea, do not broadcast that as s/he failed to listen to you. Listening does not mean doing everything people tell you to do – God forbid! Listening means hearing, considering all sides of the equation, seeking wisdom from others, and ultimately praying and obeying what the Holy Spirit leads. Trust me, I have already heard dozens of great ideas and suggestions for things at Northside – it’s actually evidence of life, things happening, and is thus very exciting! I take them all seriously, and I really do seek God’s direction on all of them – even the crazy ones!! But not all ideas/suggestions were/are feasible and/or fit our current vision and direction, so we may not go in such a direction specifically. That by no means is a question of anybody’s sincere ideas and thoughts. It’s the burden all of us have in our areas of leadership/career/family responsibility/etc. All of you can identify with this dilemma in your spheres of operations as well!

Secondly, somewhat related, I want to reiterate that one of the things I am especially sensitive to is not doing too many services, activities, events, nights/days out, etc. Christians have a tendency to get really busy with “church” things, and before you know it, family time suffers, everyone is tired and worn out, and then many often just check-out all together because of burn-out. I am especially cognizant of young families, kid’s events, school, homework, jobs, etc. On the one hand, know that there is no expectation on anyone to attend everything and be a part of everything. It is your responsibility to seek God and attend and get involved in the things that best feeds you and nurtures your spiritual growth. To foster that on our end, we try to be careful not to offer so many functions that you begin to feel guilty about not attending something! Your family is most important (except for God of course). Families must pray and play together! On the other hand, I do think it is important that you operate in the fruit of self-control and get plugged into something faithfully, even if it’s just Sunday morning service. If you are limited on time because of work and family responsibilities, I always believe it’s best to do/attend one or two things exceptionally well rather than a multiplicity of things poorly. I desperately do NOT want us to be a church where 10% of the people do 90% of the work!

Thirdly, one of the major practices I urge our pastors, staff, and board members to practice is asking people personally, especially face to face, to serve in a specific capacity. But not just randomly. They are required to pray and seek God for the specific people that may be able to serve in a ministry, at an event, etc. Yes, we do the announcements and provide the sign-up sheets – and we will continue to do that because we often don’t know what you like to do. But in the event that you get personally contacted by a pastor/staff/volunteer to serve in an area, may I challenge you not to say no, or even yes, right away. If God has placed you on a leader’s heart to serve in a capacity, there could be something to that. Take your own time to seek God and ask Him for direction. Even if your initial response is total excitement because it’s right in your wheelhouse, equally take time to seek God and make sure it is His call. Not every need is your call, even if you are really good at it! Conversely, even if you feel you are bad at something, maybe God is still wanting you to step out of your comfort zone and serve in that capacity. His calling and anointing is what empowers you to do something. The first disciples had no formal training or experience to do what Jesus called them to do. Don’t worry, we will screen you out if it’s not a good fit! (For example, you don’t want me on stage singing or in the back changing diapers, I get very queasy fast!).

Fourthly, don’t underestimate the call of anyone, even yourself, to largely operate in the gift of giving. Sometimes church members can get critical of others that, in their estimation, don’t volunteer to do anything and/or don’t attend everything. Everyone has different levels of responsibility outside of specific church ministries, and many times a person we may think is not very committed to Christ is actually very on fire for Jesus, reaping and sowing much in the business world and giving large sums of money to the Kingdom of God to foster growth. Trust me, we pray God will send us those types of members as well! Ministry takes finances to operate, and we should never underestimate the importance of those called to give large sums.

Finally, be careful of the opposite mentality as well. Some people can volunteer their time to the hilt and then adopt the attitude of “that’s it, I have done my duty, I am not giving any of my money!” While I actually do like and support the idea that we should “tithe” our time, I cannot find any way to Biblically support that your volunteer service time replaces your actual responsibility to also give of your finances. Northside is actually very blessed with members and attenders that do both – they serve as they are able and they give financially. I pray that is a contagious spirit on everyone that calls Northside home!

So again, none of these are issues presently – everyone (to my knowledge) at Northside is really walking out their faith, following good Biblical protocols, and serving as you are able and called. We feel incredibly honored and blessed to be part of this family! Nonetheless, growth will bring adjustments in organizational operations, and I just want everyone to be aware of such so that we all move forward together with the Holy Spirit.

**Other News**

* Do take advantage of the services online, especially if you are homebound for any reason, on a trip, etc. Even if you can’t watch live, they stay available via the link on our website northsidelakeland.com.
* We are aware that the sound is still an issue when tying to watch online. We are working on some upgrades to hopefully help that. Thank you for your patience. One thing I have found that helps is to stream the service on my TV or hook my computer to the TV via an HDMI cord. This allows it to go through my attached sound system while I watch it on the TV screen. This will probably especially help those of you that have an additional sound system on your TV.
* Please also subscribe to our new YouTube channel as we post services there now as well. Please subscribe even if you don’t watch online because it increases our future ability to add upgrades to our channel. <https://m.youtube.com/channel/UCJeQ3QBZ0Hw_xlKPkFss7mQ>
* Do make sure you regularly check our website northsidelakeland.com to stay informed.
* Similarly, read the entire bulletin each week, and pay attention to the scrolling announcements before each service. We are cutting back on how many announcements we share from the pulpit.

Blessings!

Doug Roth

Dr. Roth - Pastor