

Christ Community Church of the South Hills Narrative

In the fall of 2003, God birthed a dream in the hearts of a small core of discerning men and women, boys and girls. The dream - to build a great church for God in the south hills of Pittsburgh. Earlier that summer, Terry Timm announced his intention to resign from his associate pastor position at Beverly Heights United Presbyterian Church in order to accept a lead pastor role at Fountain Park Church, a church plant of Memorial Park Church in the north hills. Several couples, hopeful that Terry would remain in the south hills as part of a BHUPC church plant, approached Terry to pray and dialogue about the possibility of starting a new church. A core group was formed as others who had expressed interest in being part of a church plant were invited to gather and begin to dream about God's invitation to this new opportunity. As the group envisioned this new work, three things were foremost in their minds: creating an alternative worship environment, focusing their energy on the mission of God in our world, and keeping Christ at the center of all things.

After several months of meeting together at Eisenhower Elementary School, Christ Community Church of the South Hills was publicly launched in February 2004. Our Sunday morning experiences came to be known as worship gatherings, as opposed to worship services. These worship gatherings are carefully crafted to be contemporary, culturally relevant and Christ-centered experiences where God's love is reflected to each and every individual. Taking seriously our responsibility to care for the littlest ones that God entrusted to us, we launched Little Sheep and Faith Factor, our ministries to children. In the months to come, we would also launch Backstage and Faith High, our ministries for middle school and high school students.

God has been faithful to grow our community in many ways. Almost weekly, we are graced with the presence of newcomers at our worship gatherings. Some have joined us at the invitation of friends, while the internet has been instrumental in guiding others into our presence, through our connection with the Willow Creek Association, or by searching for “emergent” or “missional” in Pittsburgh. After trying us on for a season, joining in worship gatherings and participating in our various serving and learning experiences, we invite folks to a deeper commitment. Based upon the conviction that all believers are members of the body of Christ, we invite people into a Covenant Partner relationship as together we seek to further God's kingdom in our world.

From the beginning, recognizing that relationships – with God, one another and our world – are at the heart of the Christian life, we began to see our mission as helping others connect more deeply into these relationships. We nurture these relationships through the creation of three specific kinds of environments: worship, learning and serving. One of our foundational worship series was based on the *Five Ways of Being*, a series grounded on the New Testament teachings to be loving, accepting, hospitable, encouraging and forgiving people. This series helped shape our foundational values as we strive to live out our relational responsibilities with one another. We created learning environments in homes, coffee shops and other public spaces like the atrium of the Galleria. And early on, we prioritized serving, believing that we are never more like Christ than when we take up the towel and serve others in His name.

Growing in our love for God and others is at the heart of our life as followers of Jesus. We are committed to an organic approach to growth and maturity and therefore place our emphasis on spiritual formation, which we describe as the Spirit-directed process of Christ being formed in our lives. We collaborate with the Spirit by doing our part, ordering and opening our lives to God through a unique way of life. The image of a trellis is a primary metaphor for growth in our community and serves as a picture of a Christ-follower deeply rooted in our *Five Ways of Being*, guided by the practices of Scripture, Sabbath, examen, service and prayer, and held together by the rhythms of solitude and community.

A key component in our organizing structure is our Leadership Community. This consists of paid staff, the Leadership Team and the Ministry Coordination Group. The primary purpose of the Leadership Community is to serve the community of faith and help each person live into their unique giftedness. We believe that the best way to create catalytic worship, learning and serving environments is by investing in the people who provide leadership in these environments. To accomplish that goal, each year Terry guides the Leadership Community through a learning experience, exploring topics like emotionally healthy spirituality, teamwork and strength-based leadership.

Our emphasis on relationships has guided us into the creation of partnerships that enable us to join in God's work, locally and globally. Through our partnership with Shepherd's Heart, we have the opportunity throughout the year to serve the homeless men and women of our city. Through our trips to the Gulf Coast, we have been able to bring real hope and help to people struggling to recover from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. In 2007, Terry Timm and Barb Wiegand embarked on a vision-casting trip to Ethiopia, which would result in a partnership with World Vision in the Guraghe region of Ethiopia. Members of our community of faith sponsored over sixty children from that village, and we continue to invest in their lives through the establishment of a resource center for pastors and initiatives supporting women and children impacted by the HIV/AIDS crisis. Most recently we engaged in a partnership with the Coalition for Christian Outreach (CCO), which gives us a presence on the campus of Point Park University.

In 2008, desiring to "move into the neighborhood," (as Eugene Peterson describes the incarnational nature of Jesus' life and ministry in John 1:14) we established the Uptown Center – a remodeled storefront building in the heart of Mt. Lebanon's business district. This location provides an opportunity to be a real presence in the community, through our participation in the neighborhood First Friday gatherings and events like our Journey to the Cross art experience, as well as providing a Monday through Saturday location for our community of faith to gather.

As we look back on the past six years, we recognize the importance of clearly understanding our original intentions, purposes and values and allowing them to guide us into the future. The narrative process has provided us an occasion to pause and to celebrate God's work in these early years and to root ourselves more firmly in our God-given identity as a community of faith. As we seize this opportunity, we faithfully anticipate God's work being accomplished in, with and through us.

While we remain a non-traditional, informal and self-organizing community of faith, this in no way implies that we do not take our mission seriously or that we are without structures and processes that nurture growth among our people and facilitate the accomplishment of our mission. In the absence of a top-down, program-driven structure, we invite each community member to offer his or her gifts to God according to God's leading and the needs of the community. Our responsibility lies in helping members of the community understand how they can participate in our common mission in the world by using their giftedness, passions and strengths in ways that are consistent with our original intent and vision.

Moving forward, we seek to live out our original vision in deeper, stronger and broader ways. Deeper, in the sense that we will root ourselves more firmly in the way of Jesus, both as individuals and as a community of faith. Stronger, in the sense that as we depend more upon Christ and one another, we will experience more of the Spirit's power at work in, with and through us. And broader, in the sense that our reach will extend further into our world, as the members of our community join the work of God in the places they live, work, learn and play. As we move into God's future, we sense no need to reinvent ourselves; but rather, our desire is to simply, but profoundly, become more of who God has called us to be. As we continue to live into the story that God is writing through our community of faith, we believe that God will indeed do immeasurable more than we can ask or even imagine, according to the Spirit's power at work in us!