

## Advanced Commitment Dinner

"It all started with a porch, a group of people, and a step of faith to do something significant for the Kingdom. This has been the story of Portland Baptist, North End Baptist, and Main Street Baptist Church – changing in order to become a blessing in our city.

In each of these changes, the church had a decision to make – do we "step out" in faith, trusting God for greater things, OR do we "camp out" and maintain what we have. We can't miss that a central part of our story is the vibrant faith of those who came before us, who chose to be faithful to the command to GO and make disciples. Each of these transitions did not come without much prayer, wrestling, questions... and in the end working together as a church family to accomplish what God had called us to.

This is our story. This is who we are. This is the baton that has been passed to us."

And this is where we are tonight. Standing at a crossroads, asking ourselves important questions.

We live in fascinating times. In many ways we enjoy a lot of freedoms but these are also difficult times, especially for churches. The rapid change of virtually everything around us has left us to ask important questions about why we exist.

Also, we live in times of incredible challenge for people, for families, and the question I have been asking myself as I prepare for this night is "would there be a church that would jump in, both feet, and try to make a difference in this city?"

- Would there be a church that says, "Its not acceptable that young children have never heard the name Jesus before?"
- Would there be a church that recognizes how difficult it is to be a teenager today and would look to journey with them through these years, surrounding them with godly leaders, and give them wisdom and encouragement along the way
- Would there be a church that would be open to forming life giving relationships with young adults. A church that would say "The world you grow up in is so much different than the world I grew up in and we want to journey with you, provide a place for you to connect & belong, we want to challenge you not to be brought down the low standard of our culture."
- Would there be a church that looks at the crazy times young families are living in and would say, "We need to make sure we do all we can to help and support them as they seek to raise young Christian men and women." Would there be a church that says families are busy so we can't have them out every night of the week, but when we are together, what we offer is helpful and meaningful for where they are at?

- Would there be a church, that looks at empty nesters and pounces on them saying: your time is now! You have never had so much disposable time and income to volunteer and take ministries and help us grow them.
- Would there be a church that says to Senior's: you have lived through one of the most change heavy centuries in human history, and you have so much to offer the younger generation, and offer each other
- Would there be a church that creates opportunities for people who are grieving, struggling with addictions, with depression, to connect with others in the same boat and be a support to one another.
- Would there be a church that throws open its doors to welcome people of all ages, denominational backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, postal codes and Christian maturity?
- Would there be a church who says it's not acceptable that youth in the north end do not finish high school. It's not acceptable that single moms skip meals for themselves so they can feed their kids. It's not acceptable that adults live in utter squalor because they can not afford anything else.
- Would there be a church for such times as these?

### **River**

Many of you have heard me share before this image that I believe the Lord has given us, to help us understand what it means to be a church – **a river**. That in scripture, everywhere that God revealed himself there was a river flowing from his presence that brought life to all it touched. From the Garden of Eden, from the temple, from the New Jerusalem, and even Jesus said that those who trust in him streams of living water would flow from them. Ezekeil says it best "*where the river flows, life abounds.*" I can not think of a more captivating image for what it means to be the people of God.

I love this image for a couple of reasons: first it captures the history of our church, this is who we are, this is what Main Street has been about – finding ways to overflow & bring Christ's life to this city.

The other reason I love this image is because it captures where we feel God is leading us to go. The plans we are undertaking to build a new facility are not for us, but rather to create space for us to better serve others. Its about creating environments for our neighbours, kids, grandkids that will help us better communicate the message of Jesus Christ.

As we dream about the future God is calling us to, we have wrestled in three directions:

### **Life Impacting Celebrations**

We dream about providing life impacting worship celebrations. Opportunities for people to be transformed by the gospel. An opportunity for people to be captured by Christ' love for them, and to give them an opportunity to respond in faith.

Part of these gatherings is the opportunity to continue our *beautiful church* – that in our worship we see the Kingdom – rich & poor, West siders, north enders & east and yes, even folks from the Valley, young & old, new to faith & saints, all gathered together.

If we are going to continue to provide these then we need to make significant changes. First, we need to offer seats at our worship services at more convenient times. The transition to Forbes Drive will allow us to have a 9:30 & 11:00 service, which will accommodate 800 people. Right now we can not hold any more people at 11:00 and 8:30 is not friendly to new people. Not to mention our parking is horrendous (rain today!) and is more of a barrier than we are aware. People pull into our yard on Sunday with the intentions of worshipping with us and instead drive away frustrated.

As a church we are trying to reach more people, & every Sunday we have new people coming to our church. But when they enter our parking lot or sanctuary, or their kids attend our SS space they discover there is no room for them. This is like inviting a family for supper and when they arrive, there is no room in the driveway or street for them, so they park a few blocks away, and then when they come in the house, there are not enough seats around the table, and not enough food for the kids.

If we believe the message people hear on Sunday is worth hearing, we will do what we must in order to make room for them.

### **Life Giving Connections**

We envision providing everyone who is looking, a place to connect at Main Street. Sunday mornings are great times, but they do not allow for opportunities for people to make the necessary connections needed for someone to feel as though they belong.

In these connections people learn from scripture, they are providing an opportunity to wrestle out-loud with God's call on their life, they are able to love and be loved, they are able to care & be cared for, know and be known. It is a place where we receive the encouragement we all need for life's journey. We want to make this available to everyone.

The success of our Greater Things will make the biggest difference here. We will double the space we have now for adults. We will be able to offer our ministries of care, such as GriefShare, Divorce Care, our addictions ministry, Mens Fraternity, in living room environments, not on a concrete floor in the back corner of Raymond Hall. I remember doing GriefShare there this winter, and we had guests from the community recommended to us from Brenan's and having to close those plastic dividers, and locking people in that small space and watching people stare at each other. It was awful!

The impact will be greatest for our children and youth. We will go from being able to offer space for 40 children to space for 160. Yes, you heard me right.

Currently we have 40 children who are meeting in rooms that are not children's space, not even classroom space. Kitchens. Choir closets. The Library. This has been a problem for as long as most of us can remember and its time to fix it. The space will be creative, conducive to the needs of children today. It will allow them to move around, to be active, to enjoy their learning time.

Youth – currently we have zero space for youth. Think about that. A church that values youth as much as Main Street. That has invested as much time, energy and money, but has never provided ministry space for youth. The youth have over the last number of years met in the North End Community Centre until it became too disgusting to be used. Now the High school students fill my office and we have put the middle school youth in the library.

We envision providing our youth with a space that allows our outstanding leaders to minister to youth in ways that are relevant to their needs. Creating space that most of us adults would call repulsive.

### **Life Enriching Contributing**

We believe that everyone has a built in need to contribute to the work Jesus is doing. That our lives are enriched when we are using our God given gifts to serve others, and to forward the ministry of our church. We are going to start getting really fanatical about this in the years to come. Helping people discover how God has gifted them. Helping people figure out where it is they fit and how God can be using them. We want to increase the number of people serving. It is no secret, that time and time again, people will say that they have never felt closer to God, never felt so excited as when they are serving others.

One of our main focus' will be our Community Outreach in the North End. It may sound counter intuitive, but our going will enhance our staying. We will be freed from the limitations of our existing buildings and we can start to envision how we can build upon what we are already doing.

It's time to start dreaming big. Can we take what we have learned and use it else where in the city? All of the initial community outreach dreams of the 10 years Strategic Plan have been realized and now we must use this solid foundation and build upon it. There are such incredible opportunities for us – creating housing, ministering to single moms, helping to make sure that young people in the north end finish their education, helping the number of at risk youth. The opportunities are endless, and we will start in the new year to engage in a visioning process where we consider where to next invest ourselves.

We also want to overflow into Millidgeville. Millidgeville is the fastest growing community in Saint John, growing nearly 15% in the last 9 years. We are currently offering a number of ministries in an attempt of breaking into this community, but its time to think about how we can serve this community.

## **Conclusion**

As I close, let me share you a quote from a previous pastor, "*What of the future? Under God what our future shall be rests with ourselves. If we are true to Him, and to the Gospel he has commissioned us to proclaim, He will continue to bless us and make us a blessing.*" This was written in 1896 on opening day of the first sanctuary on Main Street.

In 100 years they will read in our history about the great banquet of 2009! The turkey, the laughter, the celebrations. They may even dig out this talk I gave and wonder what did the church decide to do with the opportunity that lay before them? That, is in our hands. Did they decide to follow in their fore fathers foot steps and step out in faith and cross over? Did they decide that to listen to Jesus invitation to come, and pour themselves out so others could have faith? Did they decide that this was their time and embrace it?

I think we are! Think about the way this church has tackled recent challenges. How quickly we paid off our mortgage over \$400 000 in less than 5 years, without a campaign to do so. Or how our church has underwritten the Community Outreach ministry and continues to sustain to the point that it is showing a surplus. I have no doubt that we are up to the challenge. In fact, I think, if we work together we would be able to build Phase 1 of our Forbes Drive facility without a mortgage. I believe it.

So this week we have some work to do. We need to get on our knees and ask some really important questions of ourselves. And as we say Yes to Christ, and Yes to his mission here in this city, we will see Greater Things come to pass in our day.

I started by asking the question of you: Would there be a church that would rise to the occasion and commit itself to overflow with the love of Christ into this city?