

## Reframing the Vision – Moving Forward in 2024

Every now and then it is good to take a step back, turn our eyes toward the horizon and review where we are going and why. God has blessed our Hardin Valley family with an abundance of talent and resources. He has done that because He has a job for us to do.

We have a mission and a commission from God. Jesus said: as you go into all the world – make disciples. (Matthew 28:19a). God has put us in the Hardin Valley community of Knoxville. So, although we have and will continue mission programs throughout the world, our primary calling is to make disciples here. Discipleship is very simply to save the lost and grow the saved. We help people to know how desperately they need Jesus and how completely He saves us from our sin through faith in Him and baptism into a relationship with Him. We walk with each other in love as we follow Jesus, becoming more and more like Him.

Our vision for Hardin Valley as it is stated on our website is:

### **FOLLOWING JESUS as one LOVING FAMILY we are GROWING EVERYONE**

It goes on to say:

*The Hardin Valley Church of Christ desires to be a church that brings glory and honor to Jesus by faithfully following Him in all that we do. We are a loving family of Christians who cares for and encourages one another. We glorify God by working in our community, loving our neighbors and making disciples by proclaiming the good news of Jesus.*

*We seek God by being a Christ-centered, Spirit-filled, and grace-motivated family helping one another grow to be spiritually mature in Christ. We increase our faith in Jesus by service to our community, a focus on prayer, worship and Bible study.*

*The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ form the core of our belief, our mission and our message. We use the Bible as our only guide of faith and practice, desiring to be one with all Christians.”*

In 2023 our Vision Tracking Team consisting of Brian Brown, Justin Gagle, Heather Holder, Lindsey Jerkins, Dan Reeves, Rich Smith and Kathy Swallows turned bullet point statements into a coherent vision for Hardin Valley’s four vision focus areas. Let’s start by recapping these vision statements. As we will see, discipleship forms a theme that threads through our vision, so let’s begin with the discipleship focus area.

### **DISCIPLESHIP**

Our vision for Discipleship is:

*“The members of Hardin Valley Church of Christ are a visible representation of Jesus Christ. We share our stories and encourage everyone to glorify God through spiritual gifts and a close relationship with God in service to the church body and the community. We are a family known by our love of Jesus, each other and those who are not yet members of His body. We focus on spiritual growth and creating a culture of training, equipping, and mentoring members to reach the Hardin Valley community.”*

Our vision is to be a disciple making church where we bring the lost and hurting to Jesus and grow the saved into an ever-closer relationship with our Lord as part of His family. Scott Sager in his Wonderful Wednesday talk told us the secret sauce of a disciple making church was a love for each other that spills over into a love of those who need to hear about Jesus. We at Hardin Valley are the most genuinely loving congregation I have ever been a part of. Our vision is that that feature of Hardin Valley continues to grow deeper and clearer to everyone in our community.

## YOUTH AND YOUNG FAMILIES

When we began Hardin Valley in 2006 one of the major focus areas was youth and young families. Our vision for discipling this demographic has not changed. Although over 50% of our congregation is over 50, we have dynamic children’s and youth ministries and strong intergenerational connections that are so important in the faith life of the younger generations. Our membership currently includes 175 children and youth between age 0 and 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

Recent studies have shown that 1 in 17 and new research says 1 in 21 church attending youth return to church after college. The one common factor of that one returning person was that they had 5 adults from church that poured into their lives in significant ways.

Our vision for this focus area is:

*“At Hardin Valley every member is encouraged to nurture the development of youth and young families to impact their community with the Gospel, practice spiritual disciplines, remain steadfast through trials, and show the beauty of Christ in their life. In doing this we are growing our entire church family to be more like Jesus.”*

Our vision is that every one of our children will remain strong in their faith and be disciple makers as they go out into the world to continue their education, build careers, form their own households, and grow families.

Our vision is that every family at Hardin Valley, young or old, will have strong relationships and loving marriages that impact children and grandchildren for generations.

## COMMUNICATION

One focus area was chosen because we are not so good at it, and that is Communication.

One of the hardest things to do on a consistent and efficient basis is communication. One old adage is “Ten percent never get the word.” Another is “If you haven’t told them 5 times in several ways, you haven’t told them.” Our track record for communication at Hardin Valley has not always been stellar. That is why we are redoubling our efforts to communicate more fully and effectively. (Today’s lesson being a case in point.)

Our vision for communication is:

*“Hardin Valley labors to effectively reach the community around us. Our community frequently recognizes us not only for providing services and activities, but also as a place where anyone can learn about God and about what it means to follow Jesus. We draw people in from our surrounding community, particularly those seeking help or belonging in a Christian community.”*

*“We ensure administrative needs are covered by clearly communicating to our members. We ensure our community is aware of our activities and resources through targeted and purposeful communications.”*

Effective communication is both internal and external. Half of communicating effectively is focusing on making it happen. The other 90% is having methods in place that make it look seamless. It is not an easy task, but with God’s help we will get better at it.

## WORSHIP

Our final but certainly not least focus area is Worship.

Worship is our constant praise and adoration for the one who made us, sustains us and redeems us. He is the Almighty, everlasting, creator God whose very name sounds like the breath of life. Our God knows who we are at the core of our being and loves us anyway. God’s Holy Spirit living within us causes us to long to be in His intimate presence and see Him face to face.

And this is our vision for worship:

*“Our congregation is engaged and led by the Spirit resulting in intense and passionate praise for God that flows through all of life. Our individual and corporate worship is centered in Christ, draws people to Christ and expresses God’s deep love and heart toward people. Everyone is enabled to fully participate in a lifestyle of praising God.”*

In corporate worship we join our hearts and voices in praise to God encouraging each other to deeper relationship with God. Our purpose in life is to glorify God, and worship

prepares our hearts and minds to focus on God, lift up praise to God and glorify God in whatever we do.

### **These are vision statements, but what does that really mean for us?**

Vision statements, no matter how well written, can come across as just words. But in the vision statements just read there is a theme that keeps emerging and flowing through all of them that your elders are totally committed to. And that theme is that we have a vision to be a disciple making church. We will do what it takes to bring the lost to Jesus and then guide, point, equip, and grow all of us to keep our focus on Jesus as we follow Him.

### **Will this cause us to do things differently than we have in the past?**

Yes, it will.

### **Will some of these things be uncomfortable?**

Yes, they will. God has plans for us. He has a vision for Hardin Valley and we are stepping into where He is leading us.

As God told Israel in Isaiah 43:18-19 Forget the former things. Do not dwell on the past. See I am doing a new thing!

Paul echoes that when he said he became all things to all men so that he could save some. Taking the message of Jesus to the Hardin Valley community may require us to change some of our methods. Although that can be scary, many of these changes have already been made or are in process.

Having said that, we are absolutely committed to the once for all delivered unchanging word of God. Our methods might change, but the message cannot change if we are to be true to our calling and mission.

### **Is disciple making something the preacher, staff and some leaders do?**

Disciple making starts with leadership but is something every person at Hardin Valley will be expected to commit to. The first and most important prerequisite for making disciples is that you be a disciple committed to your own journey in following Jesus. This is the expectation of all members at Hardin Valley. Your elders are committed to making disciples in the full definition of both bringing the lost to Jesus and growing those in Christ. Both Evangelists and Shepherd-Teachers have a responsibility to help all of us to grow "to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-15). So,

elders, preachers, and teachers play an important role in encouraging all of us in personal discipleship and in disciple making. But each one of us as a part of the body has a responsibility to help the whole body “grow and build itself up in love, as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:16). As was pointed out by Jacob Dowdy, our worship minister in a recent podcast, sometimes community outreach to the hurting and marginalized can be more effective in bringing people to Jesus than pulpit speaking. We are so blessed that Larry has agreed to continue working in this critical role of community outreach in which he is so gifted. But we all have a role to play and as a team we will be stronger and more effective than if we just have a few star performers.

### **What are the next steps in moving forward with this vision of making disciples?**

Our first steps are to continue and enhance already effective ways of introducing people to Jesus and growing disciples. Mint, Heart Sisters, Grief Share, American Sign Language classes, the BSA troops that meet at our building and the Hardin Valley Business Alliance that meets at our building are some that come immediately to mind.

We also have amazing youth and children’s ministries that are molding the younger members of our congregation and their friends into disciples and disciple makers. Our next step for these ministries is to provide the resources necessary for them to continue to thrive and grow. We will be hearing more about that from our Coordinating Deacons in the coming months.

Discovery Bible Study groups will be established that provide simple and convenient ways to introduce our friends to Jesus. The Discovery Bible Study was developed by the North Boulevard congregation and uses bookmarks as a simple tool that makes leading and replicating study groups easy. Larry and a small team have already begun several of these.

The small group interactions that have been effective with women do not seem to be as effective with men. Our next steps are to explore new ways in which men can interact and grow as disciples. Larry is working with another team to establish this ministry to men that is now tentatively called either “Band of Brothers” or “Blood Brothers”.

We will continue with the plan that has been established for worship, building on the successful and overwhelmingly well received changes that have occurred so far. Just to address two recent recurring questions: 1) Yes, we will have a worship team that will aid

in the rapid integration of newer songs. No, they will not be performers on stage. Their purpose is to focus our praise toward God and draw us into mutual encouragement. 2) The elders have done an extensive study on women's roles and have concluded that those doing announcements are not exercising authority in the Biblical sense and can therefore be either male or female. We love being able to have our families help to improve our communication as was mentioned earlier.

The new pulpit minister will be tasked with helping to encourage discipleship and disciple making.

God is leading us into the future, and the closer we stick to Him, the less rocky that journey will be. Everything in this vision for the future is about bringing praise and glory and honor to God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Your elders are fully committed to this vision for our future at Hardin valley. We continue to invite you to walk with us as we journey on together.

If you have additional questions about our shared vision, you can speak to any of the shepherds. Although all of the elders/ ministers regularly scheduled meetings are open where you can come to address specific concerns or ask for prayer, the shepherds have a vision specific meeting planned for Thursday May 30 at 6:15pm where we will be discussing questions to address and next steps as we move forward with this vision. You are all invited to attend.