

**“CORE GROUP”
(The Membership Challenge)**

Why We’re Here

May 8, 2011

Let’s pray together ...

Father in Heaven, this morning we’re conscious that so many people around us are looking for answers. So many people are hoping and waiting for something beautiful in a world that’s often anything but. Some of those people are drawn to your church wondering if in You and in us there might be both answers and beauty.

God, we confess – I confess – that too many times as a church we have taken for granted that opportunity to represent You. We rejoice that by your

grace we are forgiven for our failure but, God, we want more than forgiveness. We want to be the kind of church that opens the door for people who, in their search for truth and beauty, are in reality seeking Christ.

Make us that, Father, in spite of ourselves. We ask it in the name of Jesus who sought us and called us to be His witnesses. Amen.

Well, I'm so glad you're here today. As Ladell said, we're beginning a new series called "CORE GROUP" which will last for three weeks. Before we get into the first topic, I want to take a few minutes to explain the motivation for this series as it is slightly different from most series we do around here.

Some of you know that the term "CORE

GROUP” is what we use to describe the original 50 or so individuals who banded together to start NHCC in 1994. This little group was wholeheartedly committed to the cause and even though we were small in number, God was able to do great things through us – things that endure even to this day.

Late last fall, our pastors sensed God saying that 2011 was to be a “Core Group Year” for NHCC. As most of you know, we’d been talking a lot about expanding our auditorium space here and we knew that sometime this year we would be doing a capital campaign and inviting people to give in support of it. But God told us, we think, that *before* we get to that point, we need to do something to recapture a “core group spirit” among our congregation. We needed to invite people to once again make a wholehearted commitment to the unique vision and values

of North Heartland Community Church.

At the time it wasn't clear when we should do that but, with all the recent changes around here (which I spoke about last week), we believe the time is now. We believe that we are at a defining moment for NHCC.

So, over the next three weekends, I'm going to try my best to recruit you to the core group of NHCC just like I did those 50 people back in 1994. Over the next three Sundays, I'm going to do my best to explain to you our vision (what we're doing and how), our values and, then, why you ought to make a wholehearted, "all in" commitment to the cause.

Now, I realize that some of you have already made that commitment. You became an official member years ago. But church membership is kind of like marriage. Even

though you're still officially married, you can lose the connection with your spouse by taking him/her for granted and neglecting the little things that make a marriage work. Same thing can happen with church membership – we can take the church for granted; you can neglect the little things that make the church work. So, if you became a member at any time before April 2010, at the end of this series you'll have an opportunity to reaffirm your membership, to re-up to the "core group" so to speak. If you have questions about when you became a member, you can contact Shannon Horn and she will give you that information.

On the other hand ... many of you are *not* official members of NHCC, and while you are obviously not *required* to be a member in order to attend services and participate in our activities, at the end of this series you'll be able to officially join through a special

opportunity we're calling *The Membership Challenge*.

To complete the challenge here's what you need to do:

- Be here for all three services in this series, or, if you're out of town for a week or you can't be here one week, you need to watch or listen to the message portion of the service (you can do that through The City or our website; on the website, there's a special tab called "Membership Challenge"- click on that and everything you need will be there).
- Each week, in addition to the Sunday message, you need to watch a short additional video (on The City or the website) which contains important info I don't have time to cover in this setting.

- And finally, after the whole series is over, if you would like to be a member of NHCC, you submit the application for membership online through The City. (If you don't have a way to get online we can do it the old fashioned way w/paper and pencil if that's where you are.)

Of course, some of you sitting here aren't even sure you believe in Jesus of Nazareth *at all* so, to you, any talk about becoming part of a core group or becoming a formal member of a church seems totally irrelevant. It *seems* that way but it's *not*: what I'm going to talk to you about over the next three weeks will help you understand some of the things that are important to Jesus and will help you understand *Him* better.

"Now, wait a minute, Rick: I'm confused. Are you going to talk about Jesus? Or, are you

going to talk about North Heartland? Which is it?" I'm going to talk about both.

See, what a lot of people don't understand ... even people who have been Christians for a long time, is that "church" is *Jesus'* idea.

*Jesus said, "I will build my church [and he wasn't talking about buildings; he was talking about the concept of church], I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."
Matthew 16:18 (NIV)*

See, the church in general – and this church in specific – exists because *Jesus said so*.

And I don't think that point can be emphasized strongly enough. If you're a follower of Jesus or you're thinking about becoming a follower Jesus, "church" is a part of His plan for your life, not an optional

add-on. He wants you to make an all-in commitment to it, just like you make an “all-in” commitment to Him personally.

Now, it might be that, after hearing what I tell you over the next three weeks, you decide NHCC isn't a place you can make that kind of commitment. If so, if that's true, then you should find a church where you can. We'll even help you with that.

In fact, over the 17 years we've been together, people have occasionally come to us and said, “You know, I've enjoyed this church but at this point I'm starting to feel like I would fit better in a church that's more traditional or more liturgical (we have a lot of people who come from a Catholic background), or I need to go where the congregation votes on all the decisions <whatever>.” And what we say to them is, “Great! First Baptist NKC or Good Shepherd

UMC or Vineyard or Church of the Redeemer, they do “that thing” that you’re talking about really well. Why don’t you go check them out?” (I’ll tell you a secret: churches come in all kinds of flavors but we’re all on the same team, so it’s OK for us to do that! I just want you to know that’s an option out there.)

Our History

Now, with all that said ... this morning, I want to talk to you about our vision – why we’re here, what we’re doing and how we are trying to do it.

And we’re here because, as I said already, Jesus wanted us here and because God inspired about 50 of us in 1994 to start this church. I’ve told this story many times so I won’t go into great detail ... basically, what happened is that I quit my job as a software

engineer and Jetta and I and our girls moved to KC in 1987 so I could attend Midwestern Baptist Seminary down on North Oak. Soon after we arrived, Park Hill Baptist Church over in the Parkville area took a chance on me and hired me as their youth pastor.

And after about three years of doing that, I had an experience with my next door neighbor that looked a lot like the drama that we just saw and I began to wonder, "What kind of a church would it take to connect with a guy like my neighbor – and other people like him – who don't go to church?" And, at that point, I went "all in" on this idea and eventually, Park Hill Baptist put up \$100K to get rid of me; actually, "to help start this church."

And for nine months I went around recruiting people to the core group. I would take people to lunch and talk about the visions

and values of this new church we were going to create. I would go into homes with my desktop computer and a boom box and do a "show and tell" on their TV about what NHCC would be like and how it would be different and then I asked them to join up – become part of the core group. And I got a lot of rejections, but enough people said "yes," so in September 1994 we were able to advertise on Young Country Q104 and we mailed out 30K invitations to our Grand Opening.

And, on October 2nd, 1994, 365 people showed up for our first service at New Mark Middle School. And every weekend after that, for 5 years, we hauled everything in that it took to put on a service (children's stuff, band stuff, sound stuff, light stuff). For 5 years we would haul it in, do the thing, tear it down, haul it off and bring it back again the next weekend. Adventureland would meet in

the hallways and in the gym. Sometimes we would rent other churches to have mid-week events. It was a big production.

Then we moved to Park Hill South High School in 1999 and stayed there for three years – same drill, setting up and tearing down every week. Then in 2002, God led us to this property – which used to be a mental hospital – and through a divinely orchestrated series of events, we were able to purchase this place and remodel it for our purpose; a purpose which has not changed since that first core group came together, although sometimes we’ve unfortunately become distracted with other agendas and lost sight of that purpose.

Our Simple Vision

Our purpose – our vision – is very simple. There are three things we believe God has

called us to do as a church. And if can get these three things clear in your mind, then you'll understand a big part of what makes NHCC unique; what makes us different from other churches.

Now, before I tell you these three things, I need to encourage you as I often do: "don't hear what I'm not saying." I'm not saying that other churches in this community don't care about these three things and give at least some attention to them.

Along the same lines, I also need to say "don't assume that I'm saying that nothing else beyond these three things matters to us." For instance, the three big things God has called us to do don't include things like "growing people in their faith" or "worship" or "caring for the less fortunate in our community" or "prayer." But not because we don't think those things are important; Not

because we don't think you should do those things. We do those things, at some level – *but so does every other church*. Those things are just part of what it means to be a church. If you don't do those things, you can't be a church.

When we talk about our vision, we're talking about a unique calling that God has given us to prioritize certain results – certain outcomes – that other churches do not because that's not what God has called them to do. When we talk about our vision, we're saying that our life as a congregation is to be shaped and directed by these three things, and if we don't do them well – if they are not distinguishing features of our life together – then we are not who God intended us to be when He called us into existence and we should probably close our doors. That's how important these three things are. I hope that makes sense.

“Ok, Rick, just tell us! What are the three things?”

I’m going to give them to you all at once because they’re so simple.

1. Reach “seekers.”
2. Build a family.
3. Plant churches.

Say those with me - Reach seekers. Build a family. Plant churches.

Now, again, that’s not to say that no other church in the Northland or anywhere else in Kansas City cares about those things. Every church cares about those kinds of things to some extent. But very few churches will say, “If those things don’t happen, we don’t really have any business being in business.” That’s what makes us unique. Everything we do

should lead to one of those three goals.

Ok, let's talk about what those three things mean.

1. When we say “reach seekers” we mean “be a lighthouse in our local community where *friends* who are not followers of Jesus hear the Gospel and become His followers.”

I've said this before, and I'll say it again. This morning, when you came to church, for every 10 houses you drove past, in only one or two were the people planning to go to a church anywhere in the Northland. In 8 or 9 of those homes, the occupants had decided that something else was more worthy of their time this morning. Of every 10 people you know and I know, 8 or 9 don't think Christ or the church is relevant to their life and has nothing to offer them.

However, among those 8 or 9 people (or 8 or

9 homes) some are searching. Like the guy in the drama they feel a vague sense of emptiness; a longing for answers and for beauty in a world that's often less than.

Question: where are those people going to find the truth and beauty that's in Christ? Who will tell them? Who cares enough about them to "put the cookies on the lowest shelf" so to speak, so they can reach them just like those of us who are already convinced about Jesus?

"Well," someone might say, "that's every Christian's responsibility. Didn't Jesus tell all of us to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth?"

Yes. But it doesn't take a genius to notice that most Christians do not have the spiritual gift of evangelism – the ability to sit down with someone and look into their soul and

say “here’s how your heart is damaged by sin and here’s how God can heal it and here’s how God can forgive you and here’s how God can save you.” So, there ought to be at least a few churches that prioritize doing that and become skilled at that in a way that no one else does.

That’s us.

In fact, not long after we started NHCC, I came across a poem that, for me, captured this part of our vision very well. It’s called *I Stand By the Door* and it was written many years ago by Samuel Moor Shoemaker, the pastor who started AA. He understood that most people who were addicted to alcohol we’re really searching for something else in their life – they were searching for God. And, so he devoted his life to helping those people find God. And he wrote this poem about his life, and I think it describes our

church.

Here's how it goes ...

I stand by the door. I neither go too far in, nor stay too far out.

The "door" is the most important door in the world – it is the door through which people walk when they find God. There's no use my going way inside and staying there when so many are still outside and they, as much as I, crave to know where the door is.

All that many ever find is only the wall where a door ought to be. They creep along the wall like blind men, with outstretched, groping hands, feeling for a door, knowing there must be a door, yet they never find it . . . so I stand by the door.

The most tremendous thing in the world is for people to find that door the door to God. The most important thing anyone can *do* is to take hold of one of those blind, groping hands, and put it on the latch – the latch that only clicks and opens to the person's own touch.

Men die outside that door, as starving beggars die on cold nights in cruel cities in the dead of winter - die for want of what is within their grasp. They live, on the other side of it because they have not found it ... and opened it, and walked in, and found Him . . . So I stand by the door.

There is another reason why I stand there. Some people get part way in and become afraid, for God is so very great, and asks of us our all. Somebody must

be by the door to tell them that they are spoiled for the old life - they have seen too much of the new! "Once taste God, and nothing but God will do any more." Somebody must be watching for the frightened who seek to sneak out just where they came in, to tell them how much better it is inside. So for them, too, I stand by the door.

It is a vast, roomy house, this house where God is. I admire the people who go way in ... who inhabit those inner rooms, and know the depth and heights of God and call outside to the rest of us how wonderful it is. *But I wish they would not forget how it was before they got in.* Then they would be able to help the people who have not yet even found the door. Or the people who want to run away again from God. You can go in too deeply, and stay in too long and

forget the people outside the door.

So, as for me, I shall take my old accustomed place. Near enough to God to hear him and know He is there, but not so far from people as not to hear them and remember they are there, too.

Where? Outside the door – thousands of them; millions of them. But – more important for me – one of them, two of them, ten of them whose hands *I* am intended to put on the latch. For those I shall stand by the door and wait for those who seek it. I would rather be a doorkeeper. So I stand by the door.ⁱ

That's us. That's North Heartland. We're called to be a doorkeeper church.

But that does not mean we're spiritual

lightweights.

And I have to tell you that if you want to make me mad and cause me to sin, just say "oh, I get your church. NHCC is one of those seeker churches where you kind of water everything down. You're just interested in entertaining; you're not really interested in growing people in their faith. You put the cookies on the lowest shelf all the time" – as if there's something wrong with that!

Whenever I hear that, I just want to say, "you idiot" (which is why it's sin; I shouldn't say that) "cookies on the lowest shelf are *still* cookies!!!" And if you really want to grow in your faith, you don't grow spiritually just by worship or just by Bible study, as important as those things are. Those are like the fuel for your soul. But, you grow by getting in the game and **DOING SOMETHING FOR GOD.**

In fact, nothing will build your faith like getting in the game of reaching seekers. And I can give you a concrete example. I've got three daughters, they're all in their 20's now. And when we started this church, my oldest daughter, Marilyn, was about 11 years old and our youngest daughter, Janelle, was 4 or 5 years old, and when we started NHCC, we left a church that had a great children's program, a great youth program (I was the youth pastor). We had Sunday School, we had Awana, we had everything there. And, when we left that church, we didn't have any of that stuff. My kids did not grow up with Sunday School, Awana, or a youth group (at least not for the first couple of years). What my kids *had* were two parents who were in the game and who said, "You know, kids, here's what we're doing. We're giving up all that comfort and luxury that everybody says you need in order

to grow because we're going to get in the game." And, I'll take my kids (and, I'm a proud papa, I'll say that) and I'll stack them up against anyone in how they turned out – not because I'm such a great father, but because they were in the game for God at a very early age.

Now don't hear what I'm not saying. I know better than most that it's not all about DOING SOMETHING FOR GOD and that you can wreck yourself if that's all your spiritual life is about. But I get so sick of people who are so heavenly-minded that they're no earthly good slamming churches like ours by saying we're spiritual lightweights. It's condescending and it's arrogant.

And I'd better stop or I'm going to sin again.

Ok, first purpose – what is it? Say it with me

– “reach seekers.” We’re called to be a doorkeeper church.

But that’s not all we’re called to be because the second thing we’re to do is what? Can you remember? Build what? A family.

2. Build a family: a radically generous community that loves and cares for each other so well that our friends are drawn to be part of it with us.

See, it’s not enough to say “oh, we want to reach seekers – we want to help people find what they’re looking for in Christ by praying a prayer to accept Jesus.” As I said a few minutes ago, Jesus came to build “the church” – to create a family of those who believe in Him and follow Him.

The best example of that is found in the story of the very first church in Jerusalem.

Acts 2 says that ...

All the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's ...

... Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people [these are the seekers]. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. Acts 2:44-47 (NLT)

They were a radically generous family that loved and cared for each other so well that other people wanted "in." And that's our

goal, here at NHCC, as well. I'll say more about this in just a minute, but let's move to the third thing that defines our vision.

So far we've got ...

Reach who? Seekers.

Build what? A family.

Anyone remember the third thing? Plant what? Plant churches. Not flowers – churches.

3. Plant churches which is the most effective way to reach seekers ...

... and I'll explain why I say that in a minute ... but, in planting churches, we want to be a church that does for others what was done for us.

See, back in 1994, there was a lot of concern among other churches in our local Association when we were talking about

starting NHCC because other churches had been planted before us and they failed. So, people were saying, "why do you think this is going to be any different?" Well, if you look back at why those churches failed, they failed for one reason - money, or lack of it. Pastors had to work a second job while trying to build a congregation. They didn't have any money to pay support staff. They didn't have equipment. It was a no-win situation. So, when Park Hill put up \$100K to start this church, it was a game changer. I don't want to say that it ensured our success but it sure didn't hurt. So, we want to do the same for others.

In fact, we have done the same for others. Over the years, we've put hundreds of thousands of dollars into other churches that have started out of here. Back in the early 2000's we sent Darren Patrick over to St. Louis to start The Journey. We put \$150K into

that. We sent Bob up to Wellspring Church in St. Joe. We started Johnson County Community Church. We helped restart a church in Gulfport after Katrina. We've put a lot of money into planting churches over the years. But the truth is, we've gotten away from that. We've gotten distracted, and we need to get back to it because it's our calling.

But also because ...

"Dozens of studies confirm that the average new church gains most of its new members (60-80%) from the ranks of people who are not attending [anywhere; they are good at connecting with seekers], while churches over 10-15 years of age [that's us] gain 80-90% of new members by transfer from other congregations." - Tim Keller, Church Planting Manual p30

So, planting churches is the most effective way to reach seekers - if that's your mission and vision. The only thing that comes close to that, in terms of effectiveness – and we've experienced it here – is expanding your facility and making more room. But that's a subject for another day.

Ok, let's review. What's our vision? Three things.

Reach seekers ... build a family ... plant churches.

Say it with me, OK?

Our Simple Strategy

Now, as wonderful as it is to say "that's our vision; that's what we're here to do" ... unless we have some concrete strategy to

carry it out it's just a nice idea. So, what is our strategy – what do we do to accomplish our vision?

I think it's pretty simple.

1. To reach seekers (who are very often our friends, people we know) we provide weekend services – high-impact, culturally-relevant presentations of the Gospel (the “good news”).

Our services are meant to be a place where seekers “get it.” Now, they may not believe it. But they ought to get it. They ought to understand who Jesus is and how a relationship with Him and his church can impact their life.

Now, again, *don't hear what I'm not saying*. Just because Sunday services are the primary strategy we have at NHCC to help seekers understand and receive the Gospel doesn't mean that those services are just for

seekers. A lot of people don't get this, they think, "Oh, that service is not for me because I've been a Christian for 20 years." NO. There are people who have been part of North Heartland for a year or two, or five years and they've come to me and say, "I've been to church all my life and I've never understood the things I understand since I've been part of this church. I've never grown like I have since I've been part of this church." So, these services are for believers as well.

"But, wait a minute, Rick. You say that you're trying to present the Gospel. That's for seekers, right? They need to hear that Jesus died for them and then they need to invite him to be their savior, right?"

Well, yes ... and no. Seekers do need to do that, but that is not the gospel – at least, not all of gospel.

Here's the gospel:

"The time has come," Jesus said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" Mark 1:15 (NLT)

Repent and believe. Change the way you think. Start believing something different about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is near and it's now. It's very interesting, when you look at the context of that passage, Jesus wasn't talking to seekers. He wasn't talking to people who didn't know God. He was talking to highly religious people – the Jewish people of his day, who thought that the Kingdom was "oh, that's something God is going to do in the future. That's something that is far away. And we'll just piddle along here until God does something huge and miraculous." And Jesus said, "no, the Kingdom is near and now as well as far and

future. And you need to start living that way. You need to repent of the way that you're thinking and you need to start living in a way and believing what is true." So, whether you're a seeker or you're a believer, the same thing is true. You need to repent and believe, because growing in Christ is dependent on that same thing, continually "repenting and believing."

The apostle Paul put it this way:

Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. Colossians 2:6-7 (NIV)

In other words, it doesn't change after you become a Christian. How did you receive Christ? - "Well, I repented and believed."

And, you keep doing that after you become a Christian. So, whether you're a seeker or you're a believer the question is always "what do I *not believe* that I *need to believe* and how should that affect my life?" If I'm a seeker, I need to believe that God loves me and Jesus died for me and rose again and wants to be my savior, and to say "yes" to Him coming into my life as my Lord.

If I'm a believer, I need to believe that God loves me and Jesus died for me and rose again and is my savior, and to say "yes" to *whatever He wants to do in my life right now as my Lord.*

There's not a whole lot of difference when it gets right down to it. Repent and believe the good news *whoever you are*. The cookies are still the cookies.

Now, someone might say, "Ok, Rick, I get

what you're saying. But why do you have to try to reach seekers in a Sunday service? Why not try some other time during the week?"

The answer is simple: 11AM Sunday morning is still the time when most "non-church" people will come to check out a church and Christianity. And many of you are an example of this. You reached a point in your life when you were seeking "something" and you showed up here on a Sunday morning ... and we were ready for you.

Now, we may not have spoken about an issue that applied directly to your situation when you walked in that day, but something about how we did things caused you to say "this place seems different, something is unusual" and you came back.

And the reason it seemed different is because we know that in order to connect with seekers, we need to accomplish three goals in our services. (And now I'm letting you in on the secret handshake – this is all behind the scenes stuff you didn't know).

Goal #1. Remove artificial barriers so seekers feel welcome.

An artificial barrier is something we put up in front of people that doesn't really need to be there. For example, I can't tell you the number of people that I've talked to over the years - I've said, "Hey, we have church at 9:30 and 11, and I know you don't go to church anywhere, why don't you come some time," and they say, "well, you know, I have to get dressed up all week for my job. I really don't want to get dressed up again on Sunday morning." What do I say? I say, "Nobody dresses up at our church!" Why? Because that's artificial. Nowhere does the

Bible say we have to have a certain dress code. We *have* certain dress codes because somewhere somebody thought that was a good idea. But we can get rid of that. It's an artificial barrier. The type of music we do – the Bible doesn't tell us we have to have organ music or that you have to sing 25 minutes or 40 minutes or whatever. There's nothing about that. So, those things, if they become barriers to people, we take them away so they can face the real barriers, things like, "is Jesus really the Son of God?" "Is the Bible really the word of God?" "Did Jesus really rise from the dead?" "Am I willing to humble myself and let Jesus be my Lord?" Those are the *real* barriers that people need to hit up against. So, we take the artificial stuff away so that people feel welcome and connect with the real barriers.

Goal #2. Be excellent so NHCC family is motivated to invite friends (it's safe to invite a friend).

And what I mean by excellence, I don't mean perfect, because no one is perfect. The music is not perfect. The preaching is certainly not perfect. But what we mean by this is to minimize the cringe factor so that the people who are singing can sing and the people who are speaking have a little bit of organizational skill. Being prepared for when people, who are seekers, show up.

Goal #3. Be clear, compelling, authentic and practical in our communication.

Again, people should be able to understand what we're talking about – even if they don't agree with it; people should be able to relate to what we're singing about – even if they haven't experienced it.

A little over a year ago, I realized that this goal isn't just something we came up with because it makes sense. It's actually something the Apostle Paul modeled himself

...

... when he wrote to the Corinthians about their ineffective worship services.

I thank God that I speak in tongues more than any of you. But in a church meeting I would rather speak five understandable words to help others than ten thousand words in an unknown language.

1 Corinthians 14:18-19 (NLT)

Now, when most people read that passage they get all sidetracked by the “speaking in tongues” thing ... but that’s not what Paul’s issue is at all. What he is saying is, you can be so spiritual in a worship service that nobody gets what you’re doing. Or you can become so heavenly minded that you are of no earthly good to people. What he is saying is, “look, if I have a choice between that or

five words that encourage people, I'm taking the five words." And that's what we're trying to do here at North Heartland, "putting the cookies on the lowest shelf" so that people can understand.

OK, that's our strategy to reach seekers (our friends): to provide weekend services – high-impact, culturally-relevant presentations of the Gospel (the "good news").

2. To build a family, our strategy is to create an "experience of belonging" – to "velcro" people to Christ, the church and one another.

Because of time, we can't go into this in great detail. This is the video that is online this week. It's already been posted so when you get done this morning you can go watch that. It's a little video that explains exactly how we create this experience of belonging.

But let me briefly give you the framework of what we're doing because I think you need to understand this.

The question is ... how do you create an experience of belonging?

Well, if you think about your own life ... think about your family and what it is that makes us feel like we belong, I think it comes down to four things.

- We know and are known
- We love and are loved
- We serve and are served
- We celebrate and are celebrated

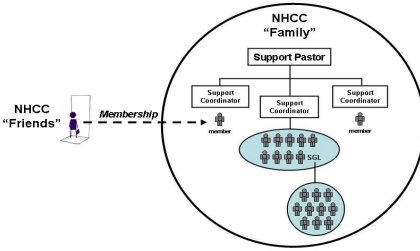
Could we all say that together? We know and are known. We love and are loved. We serve and are served. We celebrate and are celebrated.

That's what we're trying to do. And, again, if you watch online, you can see how we actually do this. That's what small groups are about. That's what the Honey Do weekend is about – loving and being loved.

Now, one thing I do need to say is that this is not an easy task, because a lot of times people will fall through the cracks. Sometimes people will say, yeah, I want to be in on the church and I want to be part of the family, then things happen and we lose track of them.

So, to help with that, we recently created this thing called the Member Support Network (MSN)...

NHCC Member Support Network



Just so you know, if you join NHCC these days, you walk through the door of membership, and then you become part of the NHCC family. When that happens, we are going to assign you to a person in the church who just wants to make sure that people stay connected and they don't fall through the cracks. So, when you become a member, we will assign you to a person who will, every once in a while, call you and say "how's it going?" Or they may see you at church and say, "do you feel like you're connected here? Is there anything we can do to help you?"

So, that's a really important thing and we

need people who will help us as the coordinators in that, so let us know if you're interested. See Shannon Horn – support pastor.

Ok, that's our strategy to build a family: create an "experience of belonging." And, as I said, you need to know more about that – it will be on the web and on the City tomorrow.

Ok, one more thing ...

3. To plant churches our strategy is to become not a mega-church but a “mega-influence church” – which means large enough to support regular high-impact launches (like putting \$100-200K into an operation like that); but small enough to still feel like family.

When we bought this building in 2002, and even before then, we knew our goal was to be a congregation of about 1,000 to 1,200

people, because that's what it would take to pull this off on a regular basis. Well, if you follow our behind the scenes and that kind of information, you know that on an average weekend we have about 700 people. So, we're about 300 to 500 people short of what it will take to be able to do this. So, we need to grow. And this is why we've been talking about expanding our auditorium, and we'll hear more about that in the fall.

The idea is to become, not a mega-church (we don't want 2,000 to 3,000 people) but just enough people that we can do this kind of thing and yet still feel like a family.

Conclusion

I'm going to ask the band to get in place and help us close here.

Ok, let's review our vision before we're done.

We're trying to do three things around here.

What are they? Let's say it together.

Reach seekers ... build a family ... plant churches

Now, here's the deal. It takes a special kind of person to be in a church with that kind of vision. When we started, when I would do those presentations, I had this little flyer that said: Looking for mission-driven Christians ... for people who think that church should be more outwardly-focused than inwardly-focused. People who want to be in the game of reaching people rather than serving their own interests. Now don't get me wrong, sometimes we're in a place in our life where we need to be served and that's what church is for, we're a family. But the family has a purpose.

So, I just want to say to you, it's worth it. It's

worth it to become this kind of person. It grows you and develops you. And it does great things for this world.

So I'm going to challenge you -- this week, think about becoming a mission-driven Christian.

Let's stand and sing together.

Endnotes

ⁱ See www.acbibliography.com/dickbhtml/article10.html