

Ministry and Strategic Overview of BSLC

BSLC is over 65 years old. It began in Milwaukie and gathered families in this new suburb of Portland. There have been a series of new buildings with the most recent one built in 1994. The church has been generous towards these projects with no debt for the past 15 years. The church has been marked by a commitment to missions and a preschool – both for nearly 30 years. The per-school remains a vital ministry with all 70 slots for fall of 2017 filled by February 1, 2017!

Our church also has a commitment to pastors with the last four serving 32 years, 26 years, 15+ years and 7 years. The church has invested in youth and children for years. Instrumental (pun coming!) to their growth was a very early adoption of guitar and drums in worship. This was at the cutting edge of worship in the 70's and drew an energetic crowd. It took courageous leadership to embrace that change so early.

In 2003, we began with four year goals: 1) 25,000 people hear the gospel, 2) 50% of our ministry was for those outside the church, and 3) 75% of those in attendance were serving somewhere. The goals were chosen to invite us into a more missional stance. We have made a significant change in that area to the point that BSLC is now marked by a culture of community awareness and action. We are well known for this in our community. After four years, each of these goals was met or very nearly met (in our measurement we only had 45% of ministry focused on those outside the church).

The second set of four year goals (2007-2011) were: 1) Build a strong foundation in use and understanding of the Bible among family members. (2 Timothy 2:15) 2) As a body, learn to listen to and obey the direction of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:9-11) 3) Develop and strengthen the unity of our BSLC family (Ephesians 2:22). The fruit of the first two goals are seen in the Bible scroll and a deep commitment to exegetical preaching as the cornerstone of preaching, and the coaster born out of our desire to hear and follow the Spirit.

The third goal took root in our small group program, which Anna helped us launch almost 10 years ago. This has been successful and has resulted in a large change in our body. We have more people in Bible study now through small groups than we had previously in Bible classes. Also of note there are more people leading and teaching from the Bible (because of these groups) than we had previously.

The small groups and the goal of listening to the Spirit have led us into discipleship. We have focused on Biblical core values in discipleship (the coaster) and we are working on how to replicate them. This includes an emphasis on families as the primary place for discipleship. Not every idea worked but we keep pressing ahead.

There are six values which have guided this journey:

1. **Doing faith authentically** – Our faith is made to be lived not just studied. We have invited members to be more hands on with their own faith. This living faith will look different in each of us. We value this diversity and don't want everyone to fit one template. An emphasis on ownership necessitates a releasing of control and an empowerment of others.
 - a. Ownership shows up in our worship services too. Pete may preach but often others welcome, pick and lead songs, share His stories and Family messages, read the scripture, pray. We have valued engagement and participation over precision and excellence.

- b. We have pressed for greater autonomy for individuals and small groups. We've spoken about the small groups as small churches. After a long, prayerful, and unanimous process the elders agreed that we couldn't keep the groups from sharing communion together. We've invited groups to dream up their own ministries and pursue them and as a result we have FPNO, a clothing boutique, outreach in Burundi, and refugee sponsorship.
- 2. **Doing good** - Doing our faith requires that we notice the hurts and wounds in our community. We are blessed to bind up broken hearts, proclaim freedom for captives and call beautiful those the world calls ugly. This is our joy.
- 3. **Making new Disciples** - We evaluated past engagement in many attractional programs and ministries and found that we could regularly get numbers but that they did not produce baptisms or disciples any longer. We understand that success isn't a big turnout for an event; success is disciples. We intentionally lessened investment in these programs and attractional ministry because they were no longer effective in the metric of disciple-making. Our faith inevitably calls us to look toward those who are without Christ.
- 4. **Making disciples** - Our culture has fed a consumer Christianity which teaches us that faith is about what I get out of it. We have valued a deep rooted sacrificial faith that is willing to swim against the culture.
- 5. **Deep relationships** - We believe that transformation occurs in relationships. Programs exist so that they can provide an avenue for the relationships. We are convinced (Biblically and experientially) that it is in relationship that people come to Christ and are transformed by Him. We believe that authentic relationships are our best hope to develop disciples, engage and keep our kids, and see people won to Christ.
- 6. **Following the father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit** - We are confident in a living God who is always active in people and invites us to join with Him. We cherish listening and want to follow only where He leads.

Overall the past decade we have seen a slow and steady movement toward:

- 1. Engagement of all.
- 2. Awareness of needs and availability to serve.
- 3. A missional, outward heart which engages those without Christ where they are.
- 4. Deepening our faith so that we stand mature and can pass that maturity on.
- 5. A commitment to relationship as God's key to transformation.
- 6. A posture of listening first and moving second with confidence that God is already at work, He will lead us and we will follow.

The PLI group being trained in Discipleship to Missional Communities is a perfect example of these values finding fruition. It is designed to empower members through relationships to see God's mission move ahead. It provides a clear way to deepen our faith and replicate that in others. Its tactic is rooted in relationships.

It is worth noting that even as numbers have declined we had 11 out of the 40 members invited say yes to being a part of this two and a half year training program with extensive personal cost (time and personal money) and risk. The PLI organization has not seen another LCMS church respond with this much energy.

Clearly God isn't done with us.