

## **Evangel Baptist Church Report on Futures Status**

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The Futures Team met on Thursday, April 12 to discuss its response to the Futures Workshop of March 23-24. *Team members are Jim Erickson, Pastor Dave, Alethea Funck, Melissa Sauter, Kurt Hoffer, Paul van Gorkom, and me.*

See our website for the workshop report. It contains the proposed actions steps and additional notes. Follow the link on the [www.evbapt.org](http://www.evbapt.org) homepage, or go directly to the document at [http://www.evbapt.org/docs/EBC Futures Workshop 2012 notes.pdf](http://www.evbapt.org/docs/EBC_Futures_Workshop_2012_notes.pdf) (underscores where it looks like spaces here).

To set the tone for my comments, I think it will be helpful to have in front of you our official Purpose and Mission (Evangel Constitution, Article II, emphasis added):

**Evangel Baptist Church is a fellowship of believers in Jesus Christ whose purpose is to know and glorify God through worship, nurture and evangelism.**

**We are committed to** understanding and obeying the Word of God to the end that our lives will be changed and growth will occur. Through the direction and power of the Holy Spirit, we seek to use our gifts and physical resources as a witness to those whose lives we touch, to the community around us and to the world beyond.

**It is our goal to** grow in personal holiness through the ministry of God's Word so that all we are and do, both corporately and individually, becomes an expression of worship to God.

To review the April 12 meeting of the futures team, I really need to start at the end. At the workshop Pastor Dave mentioned that he had been thinking about four options for Evangel, but did not discuss them at that time. After a summary and discussion of the workshop, Pastor Dave laid out the four "Strategic Options for Ministry." Some observations are based on his comments; some are mine; others from team discussion.

### **1. Retain – *stay the course – tweak at the edges***

This is the easiest approach, but ignores the observable fact that, despite many positives, Evangel has experienced a slow and steady decline over at least thirty years from a peak of nearly 200 members. (Evangel is not unique, since that period in America has hit small churches especially hard through a combination of shrinking church attendance and the growth of large churches).

### **2. Retool – *change the culture***

More than simply tweaking the things we already do, retooling involves rethinking why and how things are done. It doesn't necessarily require a change of our mission and purpose, but a fresh look at how to ensure that we are on track to accomplish it. As the futures team has met since last fall, one of the concerns expressed by a few members has been that we need to be more outwardly focused (giving more attention to the evangelism part of our mission). To do so cannot be accomplished simply by adding an activity or letting a few people do something—it represents a change in culture, a change in our DNA. The idea of merging or partnering with other congregations (in whole or for parts of our ministry) would fall into this option. A major obstacle for this approach is that changing the culture for a 50+ year old church it is like "turning a large cruise ship." But, when survival is at stake, how much are we willing to change?

### 3. **Restart – a new beginning, top down**

Basically, the pastor is released (but supported by the church for a time), a church planter is brought in, the church name is changed and a new church is started, sometimes not even retaining the physical facilities. In a restart, some people will stay with the new church, others will decide to leave. The church ceases to exist as it has been, replaced by a new church plant.

This is the approach normally recommended within Converge (BGC) and by a number of church consultants for declining churches. It was specifically mentioned to Pastor Dave as the approach that our District Executive Minister (DEM), Gary Rohrmayer, would recommend. Jim Erickson's conversations with denominational leaders produced similar responses. It should be noted, however, that there is a bias toward restarts rather than retooling because of the strength of the denomination in church planting. (Gary Rohrmayer is an accomplished church planter and was Director of Church Planting in our district before becoming DEM.)

### 4. **Retire – decide to disband Evangel Baptist Church at a specific date in the future and "wind down"**

This could simply be a postponed restart, or it could be a merger with or transfer to another congregation. (Since Converge is a voluntary association of churches, I'm not sure of the legal implications of handling the church assets, which are considerable in our case).

The four options are familiar in the church planting/church development arenas, but may be new to you. They are stark reminders that we face a serious situation following many years of slow decline, along with a warning offered by the pattern among small churches in America, with 3,500-4,000 closing their doors each year (about 75 each week!). See [www.keepgodinamerica.com/statistics.asp](http://www.keepgodinamerica.com/statistics.asp) for a summary.

### **The team's perspective**

Given the spirit of the Futures Workshop and a number of indicators of God's work among us in recent weeks, **the team felt very strongly that options 3 and 4 were not appropriate at this time.** We recognize, however, that continued decline without a turnaround will force us to face these options.

Because much of the team's early discussions with Glenn Heck focused on identifying and building on strengths and maintaining continuity, it may have seemed that we were clinging to option 1, simply "tweaking the edges" in hopes of keeping things as they have been. This however, would be an oversimplification of our position. As you will see in what follows, **the options before us more accurately represent the second option, retooling.** (There is a church Retool Kit originally developed within BGC that may become a resource for us. If used in full it is an intense process over three or four years).

I firmly believe that in the futures team God brought together a group uniquely fitted for a task whose outcome none of us could have fully expected. Each member brought specific insights and perspectives, all of which contributed to the conclusion that we can, under submission to God's direction and with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, turn Evangel around and remain a viable kingdom-building church in the future.

### **SUNDAY WORSHIP AND EDUCATION**

At the workshop, this focus group presented a number of proposed action steps, including hiring a part-time Minister of Worship Arts, integrating positive aspects of each of our two services into the other, suspending LIF@Etime for a year, emphasizing education through small groups, and exploring expansion of the mid-week service.

There was considerable discussion during the workshop and since then about the suggestion that LIF@Etime be suspended for a year. There was also strong support for the second service ("Gateway") and the impact it has had on the lives of those involved, especially among the Gateway team members

Since Gateway began under Jason's leadership there has been a team of about ten people who help plan the services and a number of outreach events. Pastor Dave began meeting with the team after Jason left and has presented the message a number of times (unlike other churches with multiple services where the sermon is the same, Pastor Dave has given a different, shorter message in Gateway. We are grateful for that extraordinary effort and recognize that, for his sake, it cannot be expected to continue.

It should be pointed out that this group differs from the Worship Board in at least two distinct ways.

First, while the Worship Board assists with specific functions (lining up people to pray, read Scripture, serve communion, etc.), other than a few seasonal services that the Board plans in detail, planning for the 9:30 service is the responsibility of the Senior Pastor.

Second, Gateway began under Jason's leadership as an extension of his duties as Associate Pastor. It remained something of an orphan in terms of accountability, with Jason reporting to Church Council but no board overseeing it. Initially it was viewed predominantly as an outreach and, coincidentally, four of the present Gateway team have been elected to the Community Care Board, which is responsible for outreach. While there is still a strong desire for outreach, in recent months the Gateway team has moved in the direction of recognizing Gateway as our "second service," and recommended that Church Council place it under the auspices of the Worship Board. Additionally, since the Worship Board is short one elected member, it has also been suggested that one of the Gateway team be nominated for congregational election to fill the vacancy.

Based on responses at and after the workshop, both Alethea Funck and Melissa Sauter felt that it could be possible to rearrange the Sunday schedule to accommodate all three activities in separate time slots. (This was actually discussed in the focus group—see the workshop report). This would resolve the immediate Gateway/LIF@Etime conflict which forces people to choose between the two.

Following lengthy discussion of the pros and cons of "retaining" but rearranging, another option began to emerge. Kurt Hoffer (a member of the Gateway team) suggested that while Gateway had not grown numerically, the Lord had produced significant personal growth, especially among the members of the Gateway team and a few attenders. He suggested that, given our limited resources as a congregation, we reconsider merging the two services. Melissa Sauter (also on the Gateway team) agreed and suggested that the summer would be a good time to experiment with this approach.

### **A plan for this summer**

Initially, Melissa requested (and I supported) the idea of bringing the Worship Board into the discussion at the next Gateway team meeting May 5. In order to prepare the team for this, Melissa suggested that the Gateway team meet on its own earlier. However, the relationship between the Worship Board and Pastor Dave is different than the relationship between the Gateway team and either Pastor Jason or Pastor Dave (see note above). The Worship Board at its meeting April 17 did not feel such a meeting was necessary, since Pastor Dave is already responsible for planning the 9:30 service and ideas from the Gateway team should be addressed to him. The board adopted a statement that includes these key elements:

- A single worship service at 9:30 from June 3 through September 30.
- Pastor Dave to retain responsibility for planning, with the understanding that he is able to delegate portions or a number of whole services to one or more individuals.
- New elements are encouraged ("creative ways of teaching, encouraging, and adoring the Lord would be welcomed").
- Recommend to the congregation the election of the one of the Gateway team members to the vacancy on the Worship Board.

### **Already prepared**

The recent replacement of the video projector in the sanctuary has not only improved the quality of the PowerPoint visuals, but enabled far more effective integration of video into services, as seen this past Sunday. Previous efforts at video have been sadly disappointing and questionable in effectiveness. This opens up a host of possibilities, including videos of people who may feel uncomfortable doing a "live" Ministry Moment, "man on the street" interviews on a topic in the sermon, reports of service projects, etc.

In earlier discussions of equipment needs for the sanctuary, one suggestion was for the purchase of an electronic drum set, which would facilitate more frequent integration of a full praise band into the service. (In fact, this suggestion won out over equally worthy items for the sound system, which are still on the "wish list"). A number of people have commented that they missed the praise band since Melissa resigned as worship assistant in order to focus on Gateway—and have appreciated the few times when they have involved in the 9:30 service (as on Easter, when there was a single service). The electronic version is smaller than the full set from downstairs and does not require the Plexiglas baffle, so it lends itself far better to the sanctuary. A donor committed to cover the cost, so it was ordered this past weekend and should be delivered this week.

### **Minister of Worship Arts**

The combination of losing Anne Branch (Choir Director) and Pastor Jason last fall, prompted the Worship Board to explore options. One of the futures workshop action steps was the immediate hiring of a part-time Minister of Worship Arts, based on that recommendation from the Worship Board, which had already been discussed by Church Council.

While it is unlikely we will be able to fill this position for even part of the single-service experiment this summer, the addition of such a person could greatly assist our efforts to enhance worship and provide Pastor Dave with much-needed staff-level assistance. Whether we retain the single service in the fall or go back to two services in different settings, having a capable person in this position could help maximize the development and utilization of the many talents in the Evangel family.

### **LIF@Etime**

With the negative response to the idea of suspending LIF@Etime, it is not dead but its future does need to be addressed. In particular, if the single service is successful, then the second hour (whether under LIF@Etime or another label) can focus on education/discipleship and has the potential of it being recast. For example, without stretching limited resources too thin, the second hour could possibly support a small group or something like a sermon discussion group as an option to the primary class.

There is normally no LIF@Etime in the summer, so there is time to prepare for September. Following the Graham Center session on local church evangelism on April 13, Pastor Dave contacted Lon Allison, director the Billy Graham Center. He has agreed to speak one Sunday morning at the 9:30 service, then conduct two sessions on evangelism training during LIF@Etime.

To date, the Educational Ministries Board has had a relationship with Pastor Dave similar to that with the Worship Board. He does the planning, the Board reviews plans, evaluates, and helps facilitate. Since the Board is currently treading water in regard to children's ministry (teachers are scheduled, should there be a need), it is an appropriate time to look into its adult educational responsibilities and conduct such a discussion with Pastor Dave.

The next Ed Ministries meeting (April 24) will be held in Marybeth Sauter's classroom at Christian Grammar School in order to see a demonstration of some of the classroom technology that Marybeth uses regularly. It may be that there are ideas that can help enhance our teaching and update us a generation or two! (Think here, as with everything else, not just of enhancing things for our current congregation, but even more how certain changes could be helpful in attracting and serving new people).

### **Small groups**

With the assumption that LIF@Etime would be suspended for a year, the Worship and Education focus group recommended considering small group options to pick up educational needs. This was not discussed at the April 12 meeting of the futures team, but may take on a different perspective if LIF@Etime can continue.

While that was the only mention of small groups in the proposed action steps, there was considerable discussion at the workshop of ways that small groups could service be adjusted to service a number of needs. The Community Care Board at its April 17 meeting discussed a congregational survey to be conducted in May that will help them plan small groups for the fall.

Moving to a single service, were it to become permanent, may leave some involved in Gateway falling short of what they have personally experienced. Small groups may provide a place for these individuals to experience similar support, personal growth, and boldness in witness. In fact, their example could help inspire others and help advance the need to change our culture!

### **Mid-week service**

One of the proposed action steps was to explore expansion of the mid-week service, perhaps with a meal and/or teaching once a month (this as a substitute for the loss of LIF@Etime).

This item was not discussed by the futures team, but there has been activity, largely prompted by the Intercessory Prayer emphasis at the workshop. In response to the workshop and the reading of Jim Cymbala's book *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, Paul van Gorkom and Jeff Pond invited people who could not attend the regular mid-week meeting (held at 4:00pm during the winter months) to come to a second session in Room 1 at 7:00 pm. That group, which has involved about nine people so far, has met for four weeks now, in a wonderful spirit of intercession, including elements of the futures discussion.

Even before the futures team met on April 12, on Monday, April 9, Pastor Alberto Guerra of Nueva Esperanza stopped by the church, introduced himself to Pastor Dave and toured the facility. This new Hispanic church has been meeting in Barrows Auditorium at Wheaton College on Sundays, with about 300 in attendance, and

was looking for an option for Wednesday prayer meeting for about 75 people and a once-a-month meeting for women and a small group of teens. The Properties Board met on Tuesday, Pastor Dave drew up a rental agreement on Wednesday, and Council approved it by e-mail on Friday. Nueva Esperanza accepted, made their first payment, and will hold their first session at Evangel this evening (April 18).

The initial agreement is a trial period through June. If Council feels this is worth continuing, the congregation will be asked to approve a long-term agreement at the June congregational meeting. Related to other parts of the futures discussion, there *may* be the possibility of working with Nueva Esperanza through an Awana program or something comparable, which would go beyond rental and into true partnership. This is very preliminary and there are hurdles because it would represent a bi-lingual effort, but we eagerly look forward to what God may have in store. Caution is appropriate, however, since our hopes for such partnership options with First Russian Baptist Church appeared possible at first, then did not materialize on a long-term basis.

In response to this exciting evidence of God's providence, the 4:00 pm group will merge with the 7:00 pm group tonight (last year, it moved from 4pm to the regular time of 6:30pm in the spring). Nueva Esperanza will meet upstairs in the sanctuary; we will meet in Room 1.

## **ON-CAMPUS MINISTRIES**

Proposed action steps included adaptation of facilities as specific programs are developed, making the best use of property (underutilized section at north end), increased publicity through signage and other means, and a welcome center in the lobby.

### **Building Use**

The rental by Nueva Esperanza was a quick and unexpected response to one of our potential steps. One concern that we need to give proper attention is the possible need to employ someone part-time to help supervise use of the building at times when Evangel people are not responsible—being especially sensitive to ways in which we can relieve Pastor Dave of any pressures placed upon him.

### **Property**

There has been no specific discussion beyond the workshop, though suggestions ranged from selling off a parcel at the north end to using it for garden plots (for Evangel and/or neighbors). We will have VBS this summer and don't know yet if there are any recreational possibilities with Nueva Esperanza.

### **Signage**

We have been working with The Sign Authority (company name) in Wheaton on a new sign for the driveway entrance. Unfortunately, response has often been very slow, but we expect to have a design to recommend no later than the June meeting. (Prior to working with The Sign Authority we were in contact with Fast Signs and changed vendors because they were slow!). The concept is to tear down the present brick wall and replace it with a double-sided "monument" sign that would sit parallel to the driveway and perpendicular to Manchester Road. We approached the City of Wheaton about using an electronic message board within the sign, but the city does not want to extend such signs to Manchester Road. The message board area will use movable letters, similar to other signs along Manchester.

Final design options will be presented to Council and the congregation.

**Welcome Center**

Jim Erickson introduced the idea of replacing the current literature table in the lobby with a Welcome Center that could display literature and be used for event registration, providing information to newcomers, etc. No decision has been made on how to make this happen, so it will be a matter of Council direction, unless someone comes forward to help with the design and procurement.

**REACHING OUR NEIGHBORHOODS**

Proposed action steps included developing ways to find needs in the community, develop a purpose statement for outreach and needs ministry, exploration of the Alpha program, network/partner with other churches, corporate outreach on 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday, and explore tutorial program for students in grades 7-12.

**Community Needs / Purpose Statement**

Paul van Gorkom will work with the Community Care Board on these action steps. This was refined at the Community Care meeting on April 17 to concentrate on efforts that can serve the church's mission and purpose by focusing on relationship development (as opposed to a busy schedule of one-time service projects with no potential for ongoing relationships/evangelism/discipleship other than among those doing the service). This would include such things as support groups, neighborhood Bible studies, the Alpha course, etc., some of which could be conducted on campus, but many of which would be even more effective in homes in our neighborhoods, with opportunities to be involved with other people at events on campus.

**Alpha course**

Alpha is a successful course that covers the basics of Christianity. It typically begins with a dinner meeting, followed by ten weeks of exploration on topics like "Who is Jesus?", "Why did Jesus die?" and "How can we have faith?", and ending with a weekend focused on the role of the Holy Spirit and "How can I make the most of the rest of my life?" (See [www.alphacourse.org](http://www.alphacourse.org)). Alpha is a worldwide organization. The course is already offered at a number of Wheaton area churches, but only increases its impact when used by multiple churches in an area. Jeff Pond will explore options. It was suggested that he contact Larry Funck, who had mentioned Alpha at the workshop, having done some preliminary exploration about it.

**Network/Partner/Service (combined)**

In futures team meetings and at the workshop, when the issue of partnering with other churches was raised, the accompanying question was always "how do we do it?" One way, as we found out, is God will lead people to us, as we saw with Nueva Esperanza.

Kurt Hoffer has been in contact with the pastor of Jericho Road Church, a congregation meeting at Lowell School, with a focus on service. Pastor Dave has also directed Kurt to some resources in the area of service/servant evangelism. Kurt mentioned at the Community Care meeting last night that when he started to organize a service project for the college/career group it was hard to get started, but once he started asking specific questions, the possibilities began to grow. The first project was doing some cleaning at ECFA.

Note that service differs from the community needs area above because it can be oriented at one-time projects that demonstrate the Great Commandment while building relationships among those performing the service. It is important that as projects are conducted there be reports to the congregation in

appropriate forms (similar to the mission trip to Louisiana). Ideas for projects and offers to participate should be routed to Kurt.

### **Tutorial program**

This may be an idea whose time will come later, but it quickly became obvious that this is a very big project involving a number of potentially complex areas to navigate.

### **Other**

The workshop summary document contains a list of many other ideas that came up. These may prove useful in identifying specific ways in which the action steps can be advanced.

## **INTERCESSORY PRAYER**

While not one of the three focus groups, the intercessors were asked for input. The proposed action steps included prayer for a deeper passion for prayer, a passion for people who need Jesus, and clear direction from the Holy Spirit.

At the workshop Bill France (who led the intercessor group) said he would begin praying for the service before it starts and would be available at the front of the sanctuary at the end of the service for any who desire prayer. This post-service availability has been added to the order of service and mentioned from the pulpit. Jeff Pond has substituted when Bill was not available. If you are interested in enlarging the Sunday prayer effort, contact Bill. (Some churches, including Brooklyn Tabernacle, the subject of *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, have a group of intercessors who are praying throughout the service—and some have 24/7 prayer centers. Several years ago we started a Prayer Vigil, with people committed to 15-minute periods throughout the day. Perhaps it is time to renew that concept or come up with something that will work now).

As mentioned earlier, Paul van Gorkom and Jeff Pond were instrumental in starting a prayer time on Wednesdays at 7:00pm, with an emphasis on intercession. We have already received reports of the effectiveness of that effort.

At the monthly Men's Connection we have always had a prayer time, but the meeting last Saturday seemed especially good, with deep sharing and fervent prayer.

The workshop report document lists all of the activities at Evangel for which you could become an intercessor. Look at the list, mark your calendar or smartphone, and stop to pray as that activity is taking place. Talk to someone involved in the activity to let them know you will be praying and ask if there are specific needs for intercession.

If you have not already done so, treat your neighborhood as a mission field. Try to meet those you may not know, ask the Lord to help provide means of building relationships, and offer to pray. If there are other believers among your neighbors, perhaps you can join together in a prayer ministry for your neighborhood. If each of us committed to intercede for our immediate neighborhood, imagine what God could do!



**TELL THE STORY**

In order to effectively retool, it is important that we keep each other informed of God's activity, especially among those people and activities that are not always very visible. Our intercession may be in private, but when God responds he wants the world to know so that others may commit to follow Christ.

One of the features of Gateway has been "God Things," a time of testimony of God's work in lives that can encourage others to take God seriously and be bold in prayer and witness. We have also had such times in the 9:30 service during our Prayers of the People time. **Whatever the avenue...when God does something, don't keep it to yourself!**