

## Plotting a course in 2009



Dear Church,

You may recall that our vision for 2008 was 'setting the sails'. Through the year we were committed to preparing ourselves for God to use us as a church. Specifically we aimed as a church to build on our strengths, attend to our growth areas and chart a course for the future.

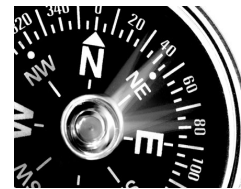
### Strengths and growth

The church continues to enjoy a strong base of committed people who love Jesus and give themselves in the service of others. We have been able to realise many of the goals we set for 2008. Among these were:

- The employment of a Children's/Youth Worker.
- The completion of most outstanding projects.
- While we have not yet been able to employ a Pastoral Care Worker we have established a team of volunteers who will begin implementing some pastoral care systems and initiatives.

### Charting the course

What started out as a simple question at one of our Church Board meetings has become the catalyst for a significant reassessment in the directional emphasis of our church.



The question was, "Should we have Christmas lights this year?" In addressing this question we began to ask the bigger question, "How effective have we been as a church at reaching our community for Jesus?" Sadly we recognised that we are not really very effective.

We began to ask why the evangelistic approaches that once worked no longer have a significant impact. It has become obvious that our society and its culture have changed significantly. In recognition of these changes it has become clear to us that we will have to adjust the way we seek to carry out the mission of Jesus as a church.

At the moment we have a lot of ministry activity and programs which are good and we benefit from them. Some of these do connect with families in the community.

However, due to changes in society, it has become obvious that there is a widening distance between our community culture and the culture of our church. This

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distance represents a barrier that many in the community would not be willing to cross. If they are unwilling to come to our programs, then we will have a hard time bringing them to Jesus!

The bottom line is that many will not find Jesus if we continue to rely upon attracting people to our programs in the hope that they will meet Him there.

**The course we are setting for the future could be summed up in the following way: We are moving away from the approach of 'bringing people to Jesus' through our church building based programs, toward a strategy of 'bringing Jesus to people' through intentional relational connections in the community.**

This new emphasis does not mean that we will be neglecting the important ministries that support and strengthen the church. We need to be healthy as a church and attractive to the community. If Jesus is real in our lives we will be attractive. The difference means that rather than expect people to come to us, we like Jesus will go into the life context of others to represent God to them.

This course we are setting has to take into account who God has made us and gifted us to be as well as who we are best equipped to reach.



Identifying who we are as a church and who we are becoming, will help us to be intentional about whom we intend to minister to and will help us achieve our aims and goals.

### **Who are we at GBC?**

Our vision statement says that we are intentional about "Being the family of God, and bringing others into the family of God"

Here are some of my observations about who we are as the family of God and some things we need to consider when it comes to being intentional about bringing others into the family of God:

- We are a family church. We are a relatively young congregation with the bulk of our ministry activity and effort being directed toward children and youth ministries. Major projects that we embrace for the future have to be in step with this reality.
- We are a larger family. Our structures and leadership models need to adapt to the unique features of a bigger church.
- We are an organised family. As we grow we will have to have a greater emphasis upon the importance of ministry teams and participation in small groups so that we 'grow smaller as we grow larger'.

- We are a family where everyone ministers. The role of the pastors will increasingly move away from the direct delivery of ministry, toward leadership training and equipping of ministry leaders.
- We are a contemporary family. As we grow we are going to have to be more deliberate about connecting with and being relevant to contemporary culture.
- We are a spiritual family. We exist for the glory of God and the extension of His rule. Our aim is to see everyone in our circle of influence moving toward maturity in Jesus Christ.

### Embracing the challenges

There are a number of key ministry objectives that remain for us to achieve in 2009. Chief among these are:

- Formulating and implementing systems and procedures to improve pastoral care and new attendee integration.
- Evaluating existing ministries, assessing their role in the life of the church and where appropriate empowering them to be proactive in connecting intentionally with the community.



### Looking to the future

Over the next 3 years we have a vision to move intentionally as a church toward greater engagement with the Gladstone community.

The distinct phases of this process could be described in terms of pilgrims



sailing to a new land. Firstly, they chart a course and identify their destination. Secondly, they begin the mission by sowing seeds. Thirdly, they consolidate the mission by nurturing growth.

Finally, Paul said, *"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow."* (1Co 3:6.) We cannot expect a harvest of people for God if we are not prepared to go and plant gospel seeds in their lives and then devote time to tend emerging relationships. Let us identify and make the most of opportunities before us in 2009.

Grace and peace to you.

Pastor Stewart

