

A NEW LOOK—A BETTER TOMORROW

Series: Transition to Simplicity, Pt1

September 1-2, 2018

ser#3764

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I. POINT OF INTRIGUE

A. Video - Miracles of the Journey. [\(show video: 2:44\)](#)

How clearly I remember our very first service. It was July 10, 1982. One hundred twenty-six (126) people attended: friends, family, ministry associations, and enemies—most were supportive, some inquisitive.

The real picture, however, was the next Sunday, July 17th. Fifty-four (54) attended and twenty-two (22) were from a home for troubled girls. It wasn't all that glorious a picture. Smile! However, by the end of our first year, approximately 100 people called GCCC home.



Our focus was simple:

1. Pull off a service. (We were renting a Masonic Club [\(show photo\)](#))

that had to be set up each weekend: sound, chairs, and nursery (like scrub the beer off the walls). You get the picture. Oh, and no air-conditioning. LOL!

2. Pray. Pray that what the Holy Spirit had called us to do we could accomplish. And that was:

- a. Make church a house of prayer (*Isaiah 56:7; Mark 11:17*)
- b. Win souls (*Daniel 12:3; Luke 19:10*)
- c. Meet needs (*Deuteronomy 15:11; Matthew 25:35-40, Philippians 2:4*)

B. From the start we met at the PMC for prayer on Wednesday nights. After a year we connected the dots. When we had 30 people 30 people gathered for prayer; when we had 90 people 30 people gathered for prayer. Smile! It didn't take long for us to notice that those who came to *prayer meeting* lived close in proximity.

We thought: What would happen if we put prayer groups in the communities in which the 90 people lived—how many people would, or could, attend?

Accordingly, we raised up “host homes” and the results changed dramatically. Almost instantly, we had 75-80 gathering in the middle of the week, praying, socializing (the church calls it “fellowshipping”) and reviewing the sermon from the past Sunday. The weekend dynamics stayed

alive and God's people prayed. We called these small prayer groups "Neighbor Fellowships."

NOTE: Sheryl and I have been a part of a NF (small group) ever since.

C. As the church grew so did its ministries, and GCCC became a multi-ministry church. And ... it worked successfully until the culture around us changed. Let me explain.

II. ADAPTING TO A CHANGING CULTURE

A. When we commenced as a Church, people went to church, school and intramural sporting activities were not on Sunday. That is not the case today. Here are the facts:

1. Let's start here! 80% of Americans identify with a religion, mostly Christian, 49% Protestant and 23% Catholic. In the late 1940s and 1950s over 90% of Americans identified with a religion: the identification was Christian and Jewish.

2. In 1937, 73% of Americans held a church membership. In 2015 that number decreased to 56%.

3. In 2013, 37-39% of Americans said they attend church ***regularly** (*once every 3 weeks). Actual figures reveal that those who attend weekly, is 17.7%.

5. More than 50% of Republicans are reported as “highly religious,” 33% of Democrats say they are “highly religious.”

6. Although 73% of Americans say, “religion is losing its influence in American society,” in 2016 64% of Americans said religion is important. This has not necessarily translated into attending Church, but it’s HOPEFUL.

7. This particular Gallup Poll, which is in line with other polls similar in nature, reveals, “a leveling off in the decline of religion in the US, with a slight upturn in the past 3-5 years.”

***Five Key Findings on Religion in the U.S. 12/23/2016**

B. With that said, as to the Church, today we live in a far more complex and competitive world. There is so much clamoring for the believer’s time and attention: sports on TV and in our backyards, electronics, extra-curricular activities, internet, social media, non-Christian colleges doing everything in their power to strip God, faith and religion from the emerging generation and the list goes on.

The battle’s a tough one, but it’s winnable. [R]

III.BACK IN THE DAY

A. Back in the day (80s-90s) we were the only church of our kind in this area; today

there are churches like GCCC—some of which are products of GCCC—in nearly every neighborhood.

ILLUSTRATION: I recall one family coming from Stone Harbor, weekly. (I’m thinking, “They’ve got to be ‘stoned’. LOL!) Another husband and wife moved to Connecticut and traveled 5.5 hours one-way every other week. That got old in a hurry! LOL! Granted, I’m bias and think we’re the best church on the planet, but I’m also practical.

B. For the first 20 plus years of our existence we were primarily a white church. But today GCCC consists of 70 Nationalities and three principal cultures: Caucasian, Hispanic and African American. Who we have become today was not intentional; we simply loved people—and people of every color and ethnic group have found a home. It was all God’s doing and absolutely beautiful.

IV.BACK IN THE DAY

We were truly a church for “my” generation and with God’s help we were successful. We have seen over 35,000 people give their lives to Christ, and continue to see people do so every week. **(Give the LORD a round of applause!)**

The task that is before us is: ***“How can we be a***

church for the ‘emerging’ generation?” Not just ‘millennials’, but ‘teens’ and ‘children’.

V. THE MISSION BEFORE US

A. In December of 2017 I went to the Pastoral and Admin teams and said, ***“If we were to start a church today, from scratch, what should it look like?”*** In other words, “How do we model church to reach the emerging generations?”

B. For eight months we have been praying, discussing and planning. Everyone said, “We need to simplify our focus and remove all of the competition so that what we do we do as a whole with maximum effort and togetherness.”

ILLUSTRATION: It was a Saturday night before our Annual Member’s Meeting. The Welcome Team presented us with five opportunities, four of which were financial:

- 1) Sponsor a teen to go to Creation
- 2) Sponsor a child to go to VBS
- 3) Pick up or was it, return your baby bottles
- 4) Volunteers for the 4th of July parade
- 5) Select your sponsorship envelope for PR

I was dizzy and conflicted. All five opportunities were compromised. This is a kaleidoscope. Time, talent and

treasure were going everywhere. What do I do? What does the leadership of the Church believe is important? We went into Sunday's service with only "PR sponsorship" and all but 16 envelopes were taken. It was absolutely amazing. It was the perfect sign from God, the "flip of the coin" so to speak.

ILLUSTRATION: So we began immediately to simplify:

- 1) The News—now called the Connection Card.
- 2) If it's not a Church-wide, it's not pushed from the Pulpit.
- 3) Our first effort was the church picnic and it was truly a "win-win." Nearly 500 people attended: infants, toddlers, children, teens, single adults, senior adults and entire families. As I went from table to table, I met one guest after another. Plus, we had people from the park join us and mention how "great it was to see so many people having fun and getting along." Smile!

C. So, in this crazy, scattered and complex world what is important to the Kingdom and the body of Christ?

1. Prayer
2. Winning souls
3. Meeting needs

Presently, we do that with the following mission: **SCS** —Share Christ, Connect people and Serve others.

D. How can we do that more effectively?

- 1.** Fewer but more effective “big events” in which the entire congregation comes together. E.g.: The church picnic.
- 2.** Develop and invest in small groups where we as a church family build relationships that have value and purpose:
 - a.** Pray for one another.
 - b.** Support one another in times of loss and difficulty. When things go awry and not the way we wish, we have a group of friends which we have come to love and trust, that is there to pray and comfort us.
 - c.** Fellowship – after about 45 – 60 minutes I have to pry our COF apart. LOL!
 - d.** Learn the Bible and guidelines for holy and successful living.
 - e.** Keep the weekend sermon alive and meaningful.
- 3.** Make our weekend worship experience the best possible without clutter or interruption by having one focus for that weekend.
- 4.** Get more involved with our local community, touching people at their point of need through

service projects and acts of benevolence. The Bible says, “He who gives to the poor lends to God.” **Proverbs 19:17**

5. As we move through the month of September, we’ll be giving you specifics on “how” we’re going to implement and bring to fruition what God has placed in our hearts. Additionally, I’ll be sharing how this “future look” can more effectively impact our state of NJ and the world at large. I truly believe you won’t be disappointed.

VI. INVITATION

Let’s go back to “winning souls.” The Holy Scriptures tell us: “Those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars for ever and ever” (**Daniel 12:3**) Jesus said of Himself, “The Son of Man came to seek and save that which was lost” (**Luke 19:10**).

What’s that mean? It means I’m a sinner. You’re a sinner...***UNTIL**...we receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. **Romans 10:9-10** says, “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; **10** for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Here's how:

Admit– your sins have separated you from God. (**Psa 14:1-3; Rom 3: 23**); **Believe** – that God did something about your sins through Jesus Christ.

(The final Pascal Lamb/Messiah.) *(Lev 17:10; Heb 9: 19-22); Commit* – yourself to His righteous by confessing Jesus as Lord and Savior. *(Isa 53:5; Col 1:22); Do it today! (Isa 49:8; 2 Cor 6:2).*

Father in Heaven, I'm sorry for the things I've done that are wrong: I am a sinner; forgive me. Thank You for loving me and sending your Son, Jesus, to pay the penalty for my sin. Holy Spirit, come into my heart; Jesus be my Lord and Savior. I give You my life. Amen!

ser3764, ***A New Look—A Better Tomorrow!*** (*Transition to Simplicity, Pt1*) Words w/ Invitation 1735)