

RIVERSIDE: VISION FOR THE FUTURE

February 2008

The Lord is the Head of the church and He is the one who grows and develops it as He wills (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 4:15; I Cor 3:6,7). As elders it is our task to be faithful stewards (I Cor 4:2), following His lead and exercising shepherding care and leadership over the flock. In terms of the local church, God is the one who desires and gives growth, both in terms of numbers (see Acts 2:4,41, 47 etc.) and in terms of spiritual depth (see Eph 4:13-16). We believe it is important to align ourselves with these purposes of God, leading the congregation to pray and work for the growth of our church both in numbers and in depth of spiritual life.

Since moving into our new church home in July 2007 we have experienced a significant increase in the number of people attending Sunday worship, participating in home bible studies, and serving in different ministries¹. The elders have been prayerfully considering how to shepherd and steward this growth in ways that will allow for continued ministry development while at the same time retaining our church's identity and core values².

Our goal is neither to be a large church nor a small church, but rather to be a spiritually healthy and vital family of believers that is responding to God. Signs of spiritual wellness include: depth of Christian character; living out a biblical world-view in daily life; manifesting the fruit of the spirit in our personal lives; worshipping together in spirit and in truth; demonstrating in our relationships and daily walk love, grace, obedience and submission to God's word. It is our deep desire and intent to be a family of friends who love God and one another, impacting our community for Christ.

As elders we have concluded the following:

- Healthy, spiritually vital churches grow. We desire to expand the ministry and influence of our church. Numerical growth is neither our primary objective nor a necessary sign of 'success,' but it is a good thing and something to strive for.
- Healthy, spiritually vital churches have both an outward and an inward thrust. They reach out to the community around them in evangelism and service. At the same time they retain an intimate, 'family' atmosphere that emphasizes strong interpersonal relationships, small groups, and deep spiritual fellowship between believers. We want to be intentional about both the inward and the outward focus.
- Healthy, spiritually vital churches are financially stable and responsible stewards of their material resources, buildings, etc. As the church's ministry develops we must give careful attention to these areas as well.

Looking to the future, as the Lord so leads and gives continued numerical growth, it is our vision to establish one or more daughter churches in the area. We believe the Lord would have us multiply healthy, spiritually vital congregations rather than strive to become a 'mega-church.' As we grow, it is our intention to encourage a number of families within Riverside to form the core of a new daughter-church. Initially assisted and guided by Riverside, the goal would be for this to become an autonomous local church. If Riverside grows upwards of 400 people in worship on Sunday and our financial base remains stable, we believe that such a church-plant would be both conceivable and desirable.

In the short-run we must consider how to respond to the kind of growth we are experiencing. Based on current attendance patterns, we could well find our auditorium effectively 'full' on Sundays within the next year. After considering different options, the elders have begun investigating the idea of going to two Sunday services in light of the longer-term goal of starting a daughter church. Nothing definite has been decided and we want to encourage the entire church family to pray with us as we consider just what the Lord wants to do in and through our church.

¹ See the accompanying chart.

² See the Riverside's statement of core values: <http://www.rcstc.org/aboutUs/visionAndBeliefs.php>