

Looking Ahead

By Todd Pruitt

When it comes to the ministry of most churches, the advent of fall is the beginning of a new year. Vacations are over, school has begun, and ministries that have been dormant for a few months are reawakened. As we look ahead I am encouraged by what the Lord has done and challenged by what He may yet do.

I am very thankful for the kindness that God has shown to Metro East over the past year. We are continuing to be blessed with many new members. After adding a third worship service in February our average attendance increased by over one hundred. In fact, before the inevitable summer slump our attendance was higher than it has ever been.

Financially, God continues to give us far better than we deserve. To those of you who give faithfully, thank you for your obedience and generosity. Because of your faithfulness Metro East was in the top five churches in the Kansas / Nebraska Convention of Southern Baptists in mission's giving.

On a personal note, I continue to be blessed by the men with whom I am privileged to serve. Jason, Doug, and Kris are great friends and partners and they share my love for this church. I am also exceedingly thankful for all of you who serve on committees, as teachers, and the many other ways that you help build up the church. Your many contributions are greatly appreciated.

There are two important priorities that we must address this year. First, we need to add to our staff. Specifically, we need support in the areas of administration and pastoral care. Secondly, as if you did not already know this, we need more space. We are hoping to have plans for phases three and four to present for the congregation's consideration in October. Phase three will be new education space for children and preschool, additional office space, and an expanded commons area. Phase four will be a 700 – 800 seat worship center.

Beyond that, there are four spiritual priorities that are driving my vision for Metro East this year. They are...

1. Christ-likeness as a glad labor

God's design for all His people is that we would be conformed more and more into the image of Jesus. We must not be content with a well behaved but passionless religion. This fall we will begin a very important series of messages and Bible studies called "The Christ-Centered Life." The purpose of the series will be to train us in the essential doctrines, qualities, and practices of Christ-

likeness. None of us will have to wonder what it means to be like Jesus. By God's grace, the result will be a congregation of faithful disciples in whom can be seen the love, compassion, and righteousness of Christ.

2. The family as the primary unit for the discipling of children

Scripture makes plain that God gives parents the primary responsibility for the spiritual training of their children. Unfortunately, it is all too common for Christian families to give this responsibility almost entirely over to church professionals. Statistics prove and experience confirms that most Christian parents rarely, if ever, train their children in Christ-likeness through role-modeling, prayer and regular study of the Scriptures. We want to change that trend. But in order to do that we will have to rethink the way we do ministry to children and youth. God has been birthing in us a vision for parent-driven youth and children's ministries. We aim to encourage, train, and resource the parents of our congregation so they will be equipped to disciple their own children.

3. Wider participation in corporate prayer

Charles Spurgeon was once asked what the secret was to the success of London's Metropolitan Tabernacle. He replied that it was the prayers of the people. There are few activities as important and privileges so great as prayer. And yet it is one of the most neglected disciplines of the Christian life. It is sad but typical that prayer meetings will be the least attended meetings that a church holds.

My hope is that the opportunities we provide for corporate prayer will be well attended. I know that we are busy people but I cannot help but wonder what it means when so few avail themselves of the opportunities to prayer with our brothers and sisters. I hope to see prayer become a part of the culture of Metro East. That is, to see prayer become a natural first response in all we do rather than the last resort.

4. A greater commitment to evangelism at home and around the world

I am not really interested in trying to program evangelism. My prayer is that evangelism and missions will be a part of our culture. That means that the desire to see lost people come to Christ will color all we do. Most professing Christians will never lead another person to faith in Christ. This ought not to be. Let us begin to look for opportunities to share our faith and invite people to church. We must begin to see the people who work with us, live by us, and sell us our coffee as lost and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

I hope also to increase our commitment to missions by being not only a mission's funding church (although that is very important) but also a mission's sending church.

As we look ahead let us pray and labor with joy toward these ends.