

Church Council DNA Retreat

February 20, 2021

Minutes

Pastor Jason gave a brief overview of the schedule and opened the meeting with prayer at 9:00 AM.

Only brief descriptions/points are included of what was presented as the material itself can be reviewed in the documentation that was provided.

5 Strands of the DNA of Leonardtown Baptist Church.

#1 Saturation of Gospel Witness—Pastor Mark

Saturation of Gospel Witness is the “foundation” for all of the other strands. Pastor Mark reviewed the opening paragraph: *“Healthy, living things, as a local church should be, reproduce as the Lord provides the increase. We commit to an ongoing pattern of church planting and strong missions partnerships so that we do our part to saturate St. Mary’s County, our region, our state, our nation, and our world with the Gospel of Christ.”*

Pastor Mark shared that he began serving at LBC in August 2007. This is a church with a heart for gospel advance. Mark explained plans that had been discussed to accommodate lack of space and “room to grow” with the idea of spreading the gospel back in 2007. It was at that time that we adopted the expanded Sunday A.M. schedule. In Sept. 2009, the Callaway campus was born and met in the CLC for about 6 months until they moved to KCA. The point of doing that was to saturate the gospel in St. Mary’s County.

“Great Commission Saturation.” This is when Seek, Study, Serve, Share was born. This is in our Covenant now. The “Share” portion really undergirds what we are talking about today. That desire to saturate St. Mary’s County with the gospel remains our focus as a congregation. It may look like planting another church like RGBC, or it may be coming alongside a struggling church.

It’s not about being the “biggest,” “baddest,” or “bestest church,” it’s about the Kingdom of God expanding, and we can only do this by expanding the gospel to saturate the county, region, state, country, and world. We don’t want to become “exclusivistic,” where it is just “us” and no others. We do want a strategy for reaching people with the gospel. We need to saturate St. Mary’s County with the gospel because it is what God has called us to do. What we are “not”

saying is that LBC is called to be a mega church. Sometimes mega churches are the least effective. None of this is about LBC, it is about the kingdom of God.

2 Size (of Congregation and Staff)—Pastor Jason

“We hold the following parallel convictions about two interconnected aspects of the size of this church: 1) the ideal size of LBC’s membership should allow for the average Sunday morning attendance of the church to meet in one worship service. 2) The ideal size of LBC pastoral staff is three full-time staff elders (a Senior Pastor and two Associate Pastors with one of the APs focused on student ministry). Both of these convictions encourage the church to build a culture of strong fellowship and effective shepherding with an eye on church planting as LBC’s primary growth strategy.”

Proposed Size of LBC:

3 Staff Pastors/Elders

1 Worship Service

Jason shared that this is a conviction that is guiding a lot of other things as well. It hinges on a commitment to one assembly and one worship service, and the elders will make the argument both scripturally and experientially.

To be clear, this is not a rejection of the past. This is what the elders feel the Lord would have us do based on our conviction, scripturally. This is a commitment that they are humbly bringing before you. This has always been a conversation the elders have had since Jason came to LBC. We have two services because we “have” to, not because we “want” to. The plan has always been to work toward one service (beyond the *2x2 Room to Grow* plan). COVID has been a great “reset” button. It has been the reset opportunity to have this size congregation in one setting with immediacy. Right now, attendance is in the 250 range (it was 320-325 before COVID).

Multi-site and multi-service is not one church, it is two churches. Jason quoted Jesus in Matthew 18:20, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them.” Jesus is in the “gathering.” Service is our worship to God, and we glorify Him better in one assembly because we worship Him together. No more choosing of your time based on your preferences, which becomes more of a convenience to you rather than the focus being on why we are gathering, to worship God. Gathering in one service also promotes fellowship.

Experientially, two “services” is essentially “two churches.” It will be a simpler structure. Make us more “little c” catholic.

Ideal staff to elder ratio. We are already feeling the need for a third Associate Pastor/staff elder with a church of 300. Without any growth, we strongly feel we need a third staff elder. This will help us “shepherd” more effectively. We want to be better shepherds.

Going from a 300 to 500-member church will need a mindset shift. We have to be prepared for a shift in the way things are done, policies are made, etc. It will require some measure of “adaptation” and growing pains. We are staffing for “growth” as we move from slightly smaller to slightly larger church.

We are a church committed to church planting as the growth strategy. It doesn't mean we are limiting growth, but church planting is the method. It is a commitment to growth no larger than what can fit in our sanctuary. Main points:

- 1) A commitment to one assembly
- 2) A finite container
- 3) An ideal staff-elder ratio
- 4) A category change for our church

Questions/Discussion from the presentations of DNA Strands #1 and #2:

Comment/Questions:

- This seems like a complete turn-around from the *2x2 Room to Grow* plan we developed before COVID.
- Is it expedient?
- Do you have the leadership?

Response (Pastor Jason): It would take 7 figures to increase size of our facility. We feel compelled that what we do represents the gospel. It would be “easier” to do some things, but less biblical down the road. For example, it would be easier to have less elders, but biblical to have more. Coming back out of COVID, it seems like this is more of an option today (than it was previously when we planned *2x2 Room to Grow*). Regarding leaders, we are already in the mindset of knowing that we need to raise up more leaders.

Response (Pastor Mark): One lesson we learned from planting RGBC was that we sent our very best to RGBC without any thought of what that would mean here. We emptied the bench so to speak and it took a while to rebuild that here. You're right, we do need to send good leaders to make a good church plant work.

Question:

- Regarding staff size, what about “lay elders”?

Response: We have already identified two men that we are working with now to bring before the congregation this summer to be lay elders.

Comment/Question:

- **Comment:** Likes the idea of the trigger point in growth being 250-400. The demographic is that when you get to 250-400 (or go above that), the congregation will not be intimate with each other and more so as it gets bigger.
- **Question:** On #2 (and all on points), who is “we?”

Response: “We” is the elders as we present it to you today. Prayerfully after today, the Council, and prayerfully after the Family Gathering in March, the church, with some measure of unity.

Question:

- If we were a congregation of 325 pre-COVID, and 250 now, where did the 75 people go? We’ve provided tools for them to tune in. Where are they?

Response (Pastor Mark): 250 out of 325 is actually on the “good” side compared to other churches, which are in the 150 range. The 75 delta “tends” to be made up of “casual church attenders.” This makes up a portion of people who never really had a “tie” to our church, but just came casually or with friends. Part of that number is our church body, and we do have a responsibility to shepherd them.

Response (Pastor Jason): We have been “hyper-focused” on the “membership.” That’s the significance of church membership. Jason’s heart is encouraged by the number of our “membership” that is engaged, even if it is digitally right now. We are mostly missing the “walk ins.” That said, it has been a challenge on some of our members and some are more casual and looser with their membership.

Comment/Input:

- 80% (of sanctuary capacity) feels crowded. Eventually we will hit 80%...what do we do then? We need a plan about what to do in the “interim.” Some churches are not going to survive COVID. There may be some empty church buildings we can use if we plant. Agrees that having everyone here in one service is great, but...need to develop a strategy and at a certain point to have a church plant.

Response: Great input, and we’re going to talk more about this in later sessions after our break.

BREAK

#3 Significance (of Membership)--Pastor Jason

“Church membership is meaningful and significant in the life of every believer. Each part of the Body of Christ needs a local expression of that larger Body to which they may belong and be accountable. Church membership is about more than a minimum level of attendance at worship services—rather, it is a commitment to a four-fold engagement with a local church where each Christ-follower seeks, studies, serves, and shares.”

Committing to one assembly makes it easier to fulfill our Covenant: *“As God established a covenant relationship with His people, the Church, we commit ourselves to God and to one another to be Christ-like in our lives and relationships through the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit so that . . . In these commitments, we submit to the Lordship of our Savior, Jesus Christ, to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, and to the leadership of the elders and deacons in their service to this membership.”* Ephesians 5:21, Hebrews 13:17)

The elder’s priority is “eldering” well, shepherding well, and taking membership seriously. One day we will stand before the Lord to give account of how well we shepherded the members of our church. This is leading us toward the decision of having a third staff elder.

Members who move away. After a year of actively encouraging people who move away to find a new church, we will recommend releasing them from membership. We can’t be accountable for their wellbeing forever, and it is hard to shepherd from a distance. After a year, we will move to vote to release them from church membership. Someone had mentioned a concern about young adults (college age or older who are not living in the area). Sometimes they just need encouragement to join a new church near them and releasing them from membership here gives them that feeling that they don’t belong somewhere, that they need to join a new church close to them geographically.

We may need to change verbiage in the bylaws to make it clear “this is what we already do.” A 6-month absence (in attendance) won’t be the only thing that puts someone on the Care List. It will be based on conversations that the elders have with the person. Attendance also isn’t the only thing that a person will be “disciplined” for but also those who are no longer in fellowship; for example, someone who is not living for Jesus. We don’t condone someone who is not living for Jesus in their lifestyle. What does releasing them from membership mean? We can no longer affirm they are living for the Lord. We can no longer say that we as elders are accountable. They are not in fellowship with Christ and His church. Church discipline is part of a healthy church body. We need to talk about discipline as a DNA marker before we actually have our “first case.” We want to be focused and clear and know who we are. One assembly is a good example for those young in their faith and a witness to the world. Gospel order promotes Gospel clarity, what it means to be “in Christ.”

#4 Stewardship—Jim Harris

Debt Free/Escrowing

“We commit to work to continually maximize the usage and configuration of our current facility. Further, we will rely upon the provision of the Lord, through His people, for the necessary resources to pursue our mission to make disciples of Christ. While not prohibiting the limited and strategic use of debt, we commit to operating debt-free as a rule and to utilize debt as a tool for which we have a specific plan for short-term repayment. We will not allow our ability to obey the Lord’s calling for ministry to be restrained by obligations of financial debt.”

Good stewardship begins with thankfulness--thanking the Lord for what He has done for us.

Main points:

- 1) God Provides
- 2) Maximum Use of Facilities
- 3) Freedom from Debt
- 4) Fulfill our Covenant

5 Simplicity of Focus—Pastor Allen

“We commit to a single worship service held each Sunday morning where the full assembly of LBC’s church family may gather for corporate worship of the Lord centered on the preaching of His Word and the practice of the ordinances (baptism and communion). Similarly, we commit to a calendar and stewardship of both time and energy that allows time for personal Gospel witness and time investing in family relationships. This commitment serves to focus us on our mission as a local church.”

Allen shared that he was first convicted about this when reading Acts 2:1-4. What if the first disciples experienced the power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and then tried to repeat that experience for a “second service?”

If the end goal/target is saturation of the gospel, simplicity is the means of hitting that target.

If the County were to lose 30% of its churches due to COVID, what do you want to see fill all of those empty church buildings? A mosque, a night club, or a new Gospel-preaching church?

Main points:

- 1) **Quality over Quantity.** We as humans have limitations. We can only do so much before the quality suffers. Excellence is what we are aiming for. We have an infinite God. We

are looking for excellence for the Kingdom. Let's keep our focus on the main thing, making disciples.

- 2) **Simple = Effective.** Effective church is a better title than "Simple Church," referring to Thom Rainer's book by that title. Aim for nothing, you'll hit it every time. We need one more staff elder to give our children and youth what they need. It is a team effort, and we just need that one more piece of the puzzle.
- 3) **People > Programs.** People are more important than programs. Jason said, and Allen agrees, that "simplicity of focus calls us not to eliminate everything from our calendar, but ensures that what we do add to the calendar adds to our focus. Is it part of Seek, Study, Serve, or Share?" Programs were made for people, not people for the programs.

Comments/Discussion from the presentations of DNA Strands #3, #4, and #5:

Comment:

- When you grow, the cost of maintaining something larger will never go away. We could probably raise \$6,000,000, but then we'd be paying more to maintain that facility.

Response: Pastor Allen agreed and said to look at our current budget and notice the cost of maintaining "this size facility" is a large portion of budget.

Back After Lunch and Small Group Break-outs

Points reviewed in our "Application" hand-out in small groups:

1. Renewed Commitment to Church Planting
2. One Worship Service
3. Sanctuary Initiative
4. Third Staff Elder (2nd Associate Pastor)
5. Small Revision of Bylaws & Constitution

Pastor Allen shared main discussion points in his small group:

- A positive lesson learned from our past experience in church planting is sharing ministries and having something in common in their ministry until the plant is capable of providing their own ministries.
- Bathroom renovations were discussed.
- Regarding a third staff elder, "Are we set on hiring a part-time seminary student, or if our giving is strong, can we go straight to full-time?"
- Regarding our Bylaws, "How would the DNA strands get incorporated?" Response was that we would have an Adhoc committee.

Jim Harris and Jason shared main discussion points in his small group (led by Pastor Jason):

- How should we roll this out to the congregation? What is the best way? Sunday morning, Town Hall? What does it look like?
- Discussion about a third and fourth elder and part-time versus full-time third Associate Pastor. The item regarding a fourth staff elder was about growing the staff larger than LBC would need it to be so that the “extra” staff elder could lead the new plant.

Jason shared the “vision” for sanctuary renovations. A plan has been devised to increase seating in the sanctuary from 325 to 400 by:

- Moving the sound booth to an enclosed space in the attic. Chairs would be placed where the booth is currently located.
- Upgrading sound booth equipment would be done (which has been needed and was part of the original Advance the Vision plan).
- The stage area would be reduced in size and seating (chairs) placed on both sides of the stage. This is where the choir would sit on Sundays that they are singing.
- Two pews would be added to the front. The pews that were there previously are at the Mission in Great Mills, and we believe we can get them back.

What would that require/what is the expense?

- Moving the sound booth and restructuring the stage would require either (a) piecing together carpet for repair/filling in or (b) recarpeting the sanctuary (recommending tiled carpet so that pieces can easily be replaced).
- Possibly placing stones on part of, or on all of, the wall behind the stage/pulpit area (if we so choose) to “modernize” the sanctuary and give it an updated look.

Questions/Concerns for Discussion

Comment:

- The idea of renovating the bathrooms was also suggested as part of the upgrades to the church. Part of that would include “touchless” water faucets, etc.

Discussion:

There was discussion about what our priorities should be with regard to renovations required. It was suggested that when we bring these recommendations to the congregation, we boil down the main points for the motion for the congregation to vote on. Regarding renovations, an idea would be to create a sort of “menu” with the mission-related items first all the way up to the cherry on top (bathrooms, stones in sanctuary).

Main points for discussion at the Family Gathering are from the Application packet:

- 1) **Do we renew our commitment to plant?** Although Wayne Hetrich is now on sabbatical, he was part of these initial discussions by the elders. Planting has been a part of the history of our church and what God has been doing in and through us up to this point. The five strands of DNA that we have presented today connect to our governing, bylaws, and values. This was a natural “evolution” of the church in pursuing its mission. Wayne had asked these initial questions:
 - a. What’s next after COVID? Where are we going from here?
 - b. What is the expectation of the church going to be moving forward?
 - c. Are we going to grow into that 700-800 church we were years ago, or do we take advantage of the fact that we’re going to have to rebuild membership?
 - d. Are we going to go by our church-planting heritage?”
- 2) **One Worship Service.**
- 3) **Sanctuary Initiative.**
- 4) **Third Staff Elder (2nd Associate Pastor).** Pastor Jason commented that at least a part-time student ministry director would be a priority. If we are in agreement, we will present this at the next Family Gathering. If it is a “thumbs up,” it goes to the AMT who has our back with regard to staffing and finances. In June, we’ll have a committee to start looking for someone.
- 5) **Small Revisions to Bylaws & Constitution.** The change to bylaws is most important and constitution change is more we “hope” we can.

Closing Remarks—Pastor Jason

Pastor Jason asked the Council, “Is this now a “we,” as in “Church Council” document now?”
The Council gave a positive response in support.

Pastor Jason would like to hand out packets to the congregation with enough time for them to review and process, then have a Town Hall meeting for discussion before the Family Gathering.

The plan going forward will be to:

- 1) Trim the packet we reviewed today with main points.
- 2) Research hiring another staff person.
- 3) Put together a way of describing the reserves to help people better understand.

Adam Osborne closed the meeting in prayer at 3:00 PM.