

## **Jeff Barclay**

Lead Pastor

Christ Community Church; Lawrence, KS

Interview by Emily Stratton in Jeff's office at Christ Community Church; Lawrence, KS

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Transcribed by Emily Stratton

### **Abstract:**

**Note:** Interview questions and comments by Emily are written in bold type while Jeff's responses are written in regular font.

**Alright, so it is Thursday, November 11<sup>th</sup> and we're here at Christ Community Church with pastor Jeff Barclay. And Jeff just one more time, for the record, we want to make sure that we have consent to have this interview posted online—**

Sure! Absolutely.

**Great.**

I'm happy to do it!

**Well then, let's go ahead, and why don't I, why don't we get a little bit of your background and where you came from, what your upbringing was like, just to get to know you a little more.**

You betchya. I was raised in central Illinois, raised United Methodist. I was very active in the local church, married a girl from that little Methodist church in McClain, Illinois on old Route 66. So early on, as a college student, I was our lay leader for our United Methodist church. Became a Christian in college, in Illinois Wesleyan University, my sophomore year. Really felt called to ministry, almost immediately, though I've done lots of other things along the way. I departed a little bit from the faith my senior year. Though I had been pursuing law, I took up a position as a professional scuba diver in the summers and so I didn't go into ministry immediately. I was also an athlete, so I decided to coach and teach, and was working toward my master's in Sports Administration: Exercise Physiology. I was a head women's track coach for Illinois Wesleyan University. Um... lacked all but my thesis for my Sports Administration degree, and chose not to go into professional scuba diving, though there was a lot of money in that. Began to teach public school—taught creationism in my classrooms in '80, '81, and was not going to be tenured in '83 or '82, so I quit. Being an out of work teacher, began a church with several other men—an independent church, separate from the United Methodist church.

And since this is a history project on religion, I really did that because in our view, the United Methodist church—no offense to those folks—we believe they were departing a bit from the moorings and the original anchoring from the Methodist Church. Now I'm still a fan of John Wesley. I think if the Methodists would have hung tighter with Wesley, a Methodist would

probably still be a Methodist. And I don't mean that to sound offensive. ...but you want honesty in the interview!

So it was an independent church, and a successful church. After about the seventh year, it became an extremely successful church. Numerically, we were growing very fast, and in the tenth year, one of the co-founding pastors, my mentor, my Greek teacher and my mentor, began to have marital problems and the church split three ways! I kept a third, another pastor left—he kept a third—and another third fell through the cracks, which happens often when a church splits. Ron had been my mentor, but I became his counselor... and it didn't work, I was ten years his junior.

So being thirty years old and now being ready to learn—up to that point I was 'going to do church the way Jesus wanted it to be done' and unknown to me, everyone else had been trying to do that for centuries. I thought I was the first person who really wanted to do it how Jesus wanted it done. And so naively, I went into ministry with that mindset. When I was thirty years old, I realized how little I knew, how desperate I was for another mentor, and there had been a gentleman in Bloomington Normal, Illinois, reverend Norman Jones, who was a Church of God pastor of Cleveland, Tennessee, a classic Pentecostal denomination that I admired greatly. Our vision for our local church that had begun, Living Word Fellowship, followed the Methodist model of planting churches in all the farm towns. And so we had gone around on Wednesdays, to hand out tracts, and visit homes, and then, basically, an old fashioned tent meeting on Saturdays in city squares in central Illinois, and lots of communities in McClain County and that immediate area of McClain County... surrounding villages of McClain County. And, but what he had done, whenever his church hit one hundred fifty, two hundred people, he split it off because he was bringing people in from the towns around Bloomington Normal, and I loved that model! And that was our model. So I merged my remaining congregation in with his, it had been meeting in a funeral home, and there was Ichabod written all over that group and the funeral home, so I spent a very powerful, powerful year with Norman Jones. And decided to join the Church of God Cleveland, Tennessee, though I could never classify myself as a "classical" Pentecostal, I admired him as my mentor.

Being new in that movement and not having a daddy who was also a pastor, I had to start at the bottom of the totem pole. And there was a church in Galesburg, Illinois that was always open. They began in 1958 and, frankly, had exchanged pastors about once a year. And so, it was always available. The church that many people used if they wanted to pastor in Illinois, they would take Galesburg, Illinois, and then go find another church. So I went as a re-start. The church building was empty at the time when I got there and had three months to get it back on budget or we wouldn't stay. And God was very merciful, and in three months we were on budget and able to support me, and we were there fifteen years there in Galesburg, Illinois. In the course of that time, we bought a bigger building, remodeled a bigger building... I became an administrative bishop for western Illinois, helped start a Christian school in Galesburg, Illinois. I've been white my entire life, but got very active in racial—interracial—ministries. Became president of the Black Ministerial Alliance of Western Illinois, which is kind of funny for a freckle-faced Scottish guy. And in the course of that time, I got a Master's in Theology, focusing on Old Testament Studies through—'Resolution of Conflict in the Pentateuch' was my master's thesis—and then a Doctor of Ministry while I was in Galesburg, as well. I taught in the Christian school, and taught Worldview. Since my background in science, I taught physics and chemistry in that Christian school... I was a busy guy! My wife and I have seven children and somehow have managed to do all of those things...

In about 1993, I was feeling a release from Galesburg, Illinois, but I wasn't feeling led to just take another church in the movement. My Doctor of Ministry made me think I wanted to teach somewhere. Since it's not a PhD, my Doctor of Ministry is a study of everyone else's PhDs. I couldn't find an exact place where I really wanted to live, and we had gone through administrators nearly every year for our Christian school. Well, I thought maybe that would make a good step for me, professionally. And through a series of events, I ended up in Lawrence, Kansas to be the administrator of Veritas Christian School, a classical Christian school, K through 12 here in town. And I was there from 2004 until March of 2009 and then my resignation there was amiable. In fact, I still do private consulting with Christian schools—spoke at a conference just last week for the ACSI convention, teacher's educator's convention for the south central region. I've spoke at classical Christian school conventions as well. I'm actually the director for school choice, a Kansas group called PIC (Parents in Control).

But I was missing the ebb and flow of pastoral ministry and was missing the opportunity to teach more regularly, before congregations, though I did lots of speaking for churches at Veritas Christian School. I was actually the interim pastor for a church in Topeka for a while... while I was doing that for a church in Wamego, Kansas, as well. But that brought me to Christ Community Church. I was in the process of moving my ordination to another movement, another denomination, and discovered the Evangelical Free Churches of America, with the strong Scandinavian roots, and their doctrinal statement really reflected mine much more than the statement of the Church of God Cleveland, Tennessee ever did, even though, you know, I was an administrative bishop for that movement and well-respected... served on numbers of state boards, and spoke at Church of God events, and camp meetings. But I was never one you'd refer to as a 'classical' Pentecostal, which by definition would be that, you know, speaking in tongues is the sign of the filling of the Holy Spirit, that there's a second work of grace, known as sanctification. I am a progressive sanctification person, not an instantaneous one. I believe we're sanctified when we come to Christ, but there's an ongoing process of sanctification through discipleship, not a moment in time where I become sanctified and no more do I sin... though the Church of God would believe that on paper. It's not practiced, but that's what they would say on paper. And I never really embraced that. And I've never been to Cleveland, Tennessee, by the way, either!

So the EFCA movement was the one I was going to go into anyway, and I had been the guest speaker at Christ Community Church off and on for several years, had felt a real affinity to this congregation, and when the position opened, I was urged by the elders to apply. And it was best for them if I started in the spring, which was difficult for Veritas, but, I remained as their administrative consultant through the remnant of that year and actually last year, did much of that as well. And again, I'm still speaking and consulting privately with other Christian schools. So... that brings us to today!

**Yeah, absolutely. So then if that gives us a little bit of a glimpse of about how you got here, then what can you shed light on in terms of Christ Community Church's background, itself? Do you know anything about its early days?**

In '88, back in 1988, it began under the leadership of Bo Abernathy. There was a plant from a very large church community in Leawood, Kansas, also members of the Evangelical Free Church of America. And in those days, they met where the Quail Creek Apartments are. And lots of folks in town are familiar with that clubhouse—it's a very small clubhouse. I've had relatives live there, and I've swam in the pool, and been in the clubhouse, and it's small! From there they moved to what at that time was a Baptist church on the corner of 15<sup>th</sup> and Kasold,

just down the street from here. And I'm forgetting the name of that congregation now... um, I know the pastor there very well and I'm forgetting the name, but at that time it was a small Baptist church and they shared that facility. Christ Community Church did their services in the morning there, and then the older, smaller Baptist church met during their regular time, at night. And then in about 1995, that church actually disbanded because there were so many major repairs that needed to be done on that property on 15<sup>th</sup> and Kasold, also known now as Bob Billings Parkway. But, so Christ Community Church bought that building, did lots of remodeling... lots of heating and air-conditioning improvements, put a new roof on, took out the pews, put in chairs for flexibility, the playground equipment that's still there they built and put in... Then, they actually began to rent—they were having three services per Sunday in that little—they began to rent some space in the strip mall right across the street, right on Kasold.

And about that time, I mean this was about 1997, and the church began about that same time, there was only room for about one hundred twenty in that building they had the three services, this property came for sale. This probably came for sale—the Archdiocese of Kansas City purchased a lot of property this side of town and that's where they moved their church. So this became available, and so Christ Community Church raised the monies, bought this property, and with a special gift, really from just one individual, they were able to buy the wooded part south of this property as well. So we own this whole block. And... that was probably 1998, so crazy when that happened. And so that property, that was purchased by a single individual, was really used as the collateral to finish the purchase of this property. So they've been here since the late 90s and Bo Abernathy stayed for ten years.

An associate by the name of Bill Herbit followed Bo and served here for—I'll have to be careful with the math—six or seven years, but five of those were as an associate. And then he was here for two years and felt like he really wasn't the one to take—quote unquote—the church to the next level under his own admission. The church probably had an attendance about six hundred at its high point, and again, had double services here. Plans to actually build a sanctuary in front of this current facility—in fact, they just happen to be right here in my office! Not because of you coming in, but we were looking at those... this was to be the multi-purpose building, originally. And if that's the building we would ever build in front, we're not sure.

Then so Bo left, and followed then by Bill's leadership. When Bill stepped down, the church really remained without a senior pastor for over a year. Bo Abernathy, the founding pastor's son had some illness, and what happened, they were looking, they couldn't get any insurance coverage and they discovered the Southern Baptist Convention had excellent insurance through Blue Cross Blue Shield, so the church took on a co-membership with the Southern Baptist Convention as well as Evangelical Free Churches of America, which is actually who founded the church. So the new staff that was being hired on... along the way they hired a full-time youth pastor, along the way they hired a full-time associate pastor to manage discipleship and small-groups—this church is still strongly anchored in the small group ministry. The Sunday service, mid-week services, have really never been a focal point of this church, but the small-group meetings throughout the week, which is typical of a lot of successful churches in this day and age, as opposed to what I came from, and the Church of God, was they had church Sunday morning, they had church Sunday night, they had church Wednesday, and if you were faithful, you attended all three. When I think of the fifteen years I was there preaching three times a week, that's a lot of sermons that people heard me preach! And then a children's pastor was also hired. So at one time, this church had a pastoral staff of four. Then they hired a full-time music director, who also took on a technology role, so he was full-time, and then a full-time administrative assistant. So there was a time when this church had a full-time staff of six.

And when Bill left they spent a long time looking, and were interviewing both Southern Baptist as well as Evangelical Free Church pastors. It boiled down between a Southern Baptist pastor and an Evangelical Free pastor. The Southern Baptist candidate decided that the building was inadequate for what he was looking for in a new position, so he withdrew his name. And another individual, I don't know if names are important? Or if it matters, but... does that matter in an interview... probably?

**No I, if you feel comfortable dropping names, then by all means do so.**

Yeah, John Allen was that person. He came here from California, and was hired then to be the senior pastor. The church had had leadership concerns of, frankly, the church had become somewhat 'silo-ed' in their ministries. The associate pastor doing the small group leadership, discipleship did his thing, the youth pastor, frankly, did his thing, and the senior pastor tried to do his thing... and, and the children's ministry pastor, she did her thing. And it was a silo-ed ministry, very compartmentalized. They were very isolated from one another, and the congregation, at that time, had the money to, just to hire people do to things that—the vision now is that the body, itself, should be doing some of this ministry. No, there's nothing wrong with hiring professional staff, paid staff, and delegating responsibilities.

So in the course of that, when Bill left, the church was empty. They hired John. The associate pastor, Mark, he decided to go into the mission field, so he's now in Argentina being very successful. Um, Mark Night was asked to leave, and he did. And Jill, the—ha, I'm good friends with Jill to this day—her mother was very ill in Indiana, so she moved away. But in the course of that time, the attendance had been dropping, and so the income had been dropping. And so from a high point, maybe six hundred, they probably had dropped to about three fifty, that'd be an estimate, in attendance, with two services. And through the course of that, then I was hired, after John Allen was hired, so when I was hired, John was the only staff member. And I was officially hired to be the growth and discipleship pastor, because of my education background. And about a year after Pastor Allen came, they just realized that it wasn't a good fit.

This church is intentionally wanting to be relevant without changing the gospel—to contextualize the gospel without compromising it. I think that's a common thread now in many churches that want to be evangelical, but realize the culture's changing and the ready voice that we used to have in the culture, you know, the evangelical voice became politicized, you know, a few years ago through the Moral Majority, and I, I mean, I'm a component of those views, but... we push ourselves off into the corner, unwittingly and, and unknowingly at the time. I was very politically active in Illinois, and I, frankly, felt used by politicians, principally sometimes by the Republican Party, because morally they... I mean, I'm pro-life. I can't help but be pro-life and, on paper, Republicans are pro-life, and I was going to vote that and believe that economics would take care of the rest. So... I tended not to vote with economic goals, but, I mean... the unborn. And I uh, but you know, evangelicalism became politicized, and we're better! Frankly, I think, the Bible is better than politics and usurps all of those things. And so our challenge here as a church is to be biblically conservative, but not fighting off those that we believe those that we are called to convert. So that's the challenge! And John, it's humorous but sad... everybody in California's cool and hip, right? That's the persona from the Midwest, where we're all backwards and if you live on the coast, you're forward thinking and...and I really think that there was a belief that someone from California—and Lawrence, Kansas, being known as a somewhat liberal community—could help us do that. And it didn't. It just wasn't working well. And so Pastor John was asked to leave.

And so at that time I stepped in and have been leading since. I've just recently been, gone through the search process... I was the only one candidate, but I went through the search process now to be officially hired as the lead pastor. They're moving away from the senior pastor title, to a lead pastor. It may only be a change in name, but it does kind of reorient the congregation as to what the role of that head person would be. The way that we're governed, we're autonomous. We're congregationally led, and then elders are delegated with responsibilities, and right now I'm a paid elder, which is really the orientation the congregation has always had. But not every pastor was an elder and that did create a group of 'elders' and 'pastors,' 'congregation,' and it wasn't a healthy, frankly, it wasn't a healthy environment. So we have since introduced a twice annual evaluation procedure of all ministries, including the elders. Up to that point there really had not been a good system of evaluation. You know, coming from my background in education, an evaluation is invaluable. You know, identifying the winds and then asking folks, 'hey how are we doing?' You know, so I regularly solicit, you know, I'm an intelligent guy, but I regularly solicit the input from the PhDs in our congregation, as well as the laborer and ask, 'did I communicate well?' or 'is the plate that I'm serving this meal on at least recognizable?' hopefully the information is new and fresh and lively but, the goal would be the plate I put it on is somewhat recognizable.

And we are seriously working now towards, we believe that service is the best apologetic that we can come up with for the gospel...by serving the community. So our, we're using the phrase 'externally focused, internally strong.' It's really our mantra. On paper you'll see the phrase, 'building relationships, growing in Christ.' Pretty much says the same thing. We've... another word-picture we've used is 'window seats versus an aisle seat in an aircraft.' And we borrowed that from a book that we've read, but you know, if you fly regularly, there are people that take an aisle seat, they get in their aisle seat, and they don't talk to anybody, and when the plane lands, they jump off the plane. And we're urging people not to get in and get off as fast as a lot of people do—to not be an active consumer of the church, but to be an active participant.

It's not that unusual. I mean, every church is trying to do that, obviously, but coming up with some word-pictures seems to be helping us. So we're asking everyone to have an aisle seat and a window seat in the congregation. And to regain the trust in this community, of the evangelical church by serving. And making the first step, which is, I think, really a model of Jesus, who never compromised his message, ever. But his example on the cross was to be a—he died for us. And if that's the hallmark of Christian ministry, to do something on behalf of another, that may be sometimes where the evangelical has missed it. We know truth, we believe we know the truth, and we readily will share that, but have we put it in the body? In, in human form, which is what Jesus did?

So, that's our goal! Uh, history will tell us if we're doing that successfully, but the church did drop to about, you know, maybe 156 in attendance, just as I was coming in. And now we're averaging a little over two hundred, maybe... two hundred adults and forty children is probably what we're having now. Financially we're close to the budget we had prescribed, and we're just now, tonight, meeting and deciding about hiring a very qualified youth pastor. In this process we've considered hiring a novice that I could mentor and train, but the church is recovering and growing and we're adding people every week and I just don't think I have the time to mentor someone. So we decided, in the course of interviews, we thought 'let, let's go big! Think big.' And a candidate that has built two very large youth groups has become available and I think he's captured our vision and the facility is inadequate, really, for what our vision is, but, but not wanting to sound naïve, but our God is a big God and we feel like—I was just typing when you came in! We're at the Red Sea. And it's time for we, as the elders, to hold the staff up and watch God part the... you know, part the sea. And that's going to be the challenge of the congregation.

## **Ideally, what does this look like—the parting of the seas? What does this expansion...**

If you can hear the heart in this phrase then: we want to become the best church—now again we're modeling this and copying this a little bit from things we've read but—we've read a lot of things and we want to become the best church FOR Lawrence, as opposed to the best church IN Lawrence. And just changing that preposition, we think, changes a lot of things. The best church in Lawrence obviously sounds somewhat ego-centric and misunderstood. The best church for Lawrence could too, but we're aware that we're going to do that, the for part, in first serving, the for part, in first inconveniencing ourselves on behalf of others, which none of that is the norm of our culture right now. We're fairly self-centered as a culture, un-churched or churched. We don't necessarily think that the non-churched are any more serving, then there's a lot of symbolism over substance. Put the church in the non-churched, and we're wanting to put legs to that. Service preaches easy, I mean, I can preach that, but doing it means sweat and blood and financial cost and that maybe means watching a little less TV, it might mean just having brunch on Saturday morning, it might mean raking someone's leaves, or hammering a nail or two, or picking up trash. So that's where we're at right now. That's really the, the focus now.

All summer long, for life training, we had community leaders come and speak to us—everywhere from the homeless shelter to, we had folks who serve at length in other places though. Teen challenge, prison ministry, representatives from the Leo Center, and Dr. Sale who has left the Leo Center and has started his own clinic named New Hope, with [New Life in Christ], formerly Heartland Church Downtown, so we had Dr. Sale come in. I'm good friends with Dr. Sale, he taught biology when I was at Veritas. Still does. He never charges us. He's an outstanding man. Anyway, so we had lots of community people to come and introduce our church to those folks, and introduce those folks to us. Our final speaker was Mike Amyx, Mayor Amyx, and spoke very articulately about the place the church can fill in a community. I mean, communities are driven by volunteerism. He pointed out how many commissions in the city remain open, you know? No one takes those spots. And just recently, we hosted a Dave Ramsey simulcast. And the theme of that was entrée leadership, entrepreneur leadership. And we see that's a real opportunity for us as a church to take a leadership role in our society. Entrepreneurship with ideas and service. So the orientation, the timing of Ramsey's simulcast was very, was perfect for us.

**Okay, so then um, going back to this idea of service and introducing people in the congregation to other organizations that are around here, would you say that rather trying to bring up your own, specific programs, you're just trying to find ways to strengthen and bolster what other else is around and kind of have a more collaborative effort?**

Exactly. Exactly. Exactly. We need to partner with the community. Now, it's good to bring in a little element of trust. Let's face it. You know, we here believe that there are absolute truths. And, and in a culture that tends not to embrace that notion, we feel like working side by side with someone would give us that ability. Here's what I'm going to tell the congregation on Sunday: every relationship has to be strong enough to bear the weight of truth. If that phrase makes sense. Maybe you've heard that phrase before, but you know, the relationships we want to establish in the community need to be strong enough so that when we share what we believe to be truth, that relationship is strong enough to handle it. And that's a challenge for us. You

don't do that overnight. It requires some heavy lifting independent before you start—people don't touch each other in the first place. We hardly ever hold each other anymore, right? And, and so the holding we're talking about is an emotional, emotional holding to be there. The ministry of presence is another phrase that I often use. Bring credibility and bring some substance to what we claim to be! It's a challenge. To the degree that we do it well, that will be the degree that we actually do get to become the best church for Lawrence.

And by the way, it wouldn't bother me if every church told you the exact same thing. I've done a lot, got a lot, you know, I used to... I've been in marketing, I've worked for General Telephone, I used to work for newspaper when I was church planting, and I would point out, you know, the reason a McDonalds and a Hardy's and a Burger King and a Dairy Queen are all on the same corner is the success of one brings success to others and... I'm president of the Ministerial Association for Lawrence, for the Lawrence Association of Evangelicals, and I'm absolutely convinced of this, that one church isn't going to accomplish the mission of Christ in this city, and the success of one church can open up the door of success to others. They know that in the business world. That's why there are strip malls. Sometimes in that strip mall there are two companies selling the exact same products, but there's a reason why they're sharing space, and that lights me up.

You know I, having been involved in a lot of interracial ministry, I don't even like thinking, talking about color, but it's there. Having been the president of the Black Ministerial Alliance of Western Illinois, which included from Rock Island, Davenport, Illinois clear down to Quincy, Illinois, over to Peoria and back up to Galesburg—a large area. So since I've moved here, I've been a part of the Martin Luther King Day Committee. I'm very good friends with Paul Wynn, who'd be a good guy for you to meet. I met Paul. Paul used to work for the city, he was an investigator for human rights violations and that kind of thing for the city, Reverend Paul Winn. His church is just off downtown, it's a Church of [God in] Christ... I'm drawing a blank... Praise Temple. Praise Temple Church of [God in] Christ. Paul Winn. Definitely gotta talk to Paul. Best dressed man in town. You can tell him that. But he's the president of the Ecumenical Fellowship, which is predominantly the black ministerial association. And to be honest, in Free State Lawrence, Kansas, it seems a little weird—wrong—that there is a black, predominantly black, ministerial association, and a predominantly white, though African American pastors are members of the LAE. And I regularly attend Ecumenical Fellowship things.

And so in May, through, perhaps the unifying group, the Greater Lawrence Christian Men's Fellowship, which is a non-denominational group headed by Mark Griffin (I'm on the steering committee for that organization). Turner Gil, the head football coach, who is African American, is going to be speaking at a breakfast in May, and we're hoping that representatives of that—the LAE and the Ecumenical Fellowship—can attend that breakfast and you know, maybe become eventually one. My goal, frankly, I'm not sure how much longer I'll be president of the ministerial association, would be, while their main autonomous groups, just for some reason, that there would be a very, very close working relationship between these two fellowships. It seems, just seems silly that there are two. This is an evangelical—both our groups are evangelical-orientated ministerial alliances. And it seems to only make sense that the two would be working more closely, you know. We're clearly aligned in mission. ...so why not work together?

**Yeah. Well still kind of hovering around this Lawrence context, and addressing this goal to be the best church for Lawrence, what are some of the challenges that are specific to Lawrence? I know a lot of people will say, being in Kansas, Lawrence is kind of an**



**anomaly, it's a different place than the rest of Kansas, so what kind of challenges does that present, or do you see it as being challenging, or do you...**

Well, I said it like this. If I'm a life insurance salesman, and I discover that I'm moving to a community that a lot of people don't have life insurance, that's where I want to open my shop. Before, when I came, I saw a study. And I don't have it in front of me, you could probably find it, but it said that Lawrence, Kansas is the sixth least—did you come across this in any of your other interviews?

**Not yet**

That Lawrence, Kansas is the sixth least churching city of 100,000 or more in the United States of America. Um, that's what I was told. David Taylor, who is Paul Taylor's son, was the one who showed me the survey first. Paul Taylor is associate pastor at Mustard Seed. And I know that study is available. I've seen it. And they said, it went so far as to count available pew space in this town. And, you'd have to check the article to, I'm not sure who did the study, but I saw charts and numbers that only 40% of the population could fit in our churches if everybody, if every pew was full. So this is really an under-churched—I don't know if it's unchurched—it's an under-churched community. I came from Galesburg, Illinois where there were three times as many churches in a town of 36,000, than there is in this town. And this town, because there is a—I don't know that liberal is the right word, I'm not sure what the word you use... unchurched? A resistance towards absolutes? There aren't, the store-front churches don't really exist in this town as much as in some communities. Either a church makes it, or does not. If the average church in America is under 100, we don't have a lot of those churches. I mean, they have attendances just hovering below that, but on paper they're much larger. And either a church in this town looks like it either makes it or it doesn't. And that may be where that statistic comes from, it being the sixth least churching town. Because there aren't a lot of store-front signs where you've got 25 people attending church. And in Galesburg, Illinois, we had a lot of that. But that's what makes up the body of believers in the United States of America. I mean, there's the mega-churches, but frankly, we forget about the broader base, which is much, much smaller churches all over. You know, go to western Kansas. There are vibrant ministries, but in very small communities, thereby the churches tend to be small.

So for us, I mean, in this environment we can't, we just can't afford to apologize for what we believe. And so our goal here is, we... you know, Wal-Mart does everything they can, you know (probably in this town a lot of people don't even like Wal-Mart!), but, you know, their goal is to remove every barrier to a customer, you know. They want to be an attractive place when people come in. They want to be a friendly place—that's why they have greeters. They want to be full-service if they possibly can. And that's the challenge, I think, for churches. We have to take an honest look at ourselves and ask ourselves, 'are there barriers to communicating what we believe to be true?' Let's face it. Christianity has its own distinct language. Its only, all distinct terms. And we have to make sure that the words we're using are understood by our listeners. That forces us to go back and check the words we're using.

You know, all of my messages are on a Keynote, or a PowerPoint. The scriptures tend to be on the screen, in case if anyone didn't bring a Bible. But I also put the page numbers (we have two versions of the pew Bibles), and so on my screen, when I'm reading a text, it references where to look in those Bibles to find that specific passage, in case if someone can't find the book of the Bible. And why would we expect them to know, you know, if they're unchurched? And so we've tried to remove that barrier. If a cup of coffee means anything to someone, you know, we can take coffee in the sanctuary. We cross that bridge by just saying 'hey you gotta have a lid on it,'

and periodically our janitors are cleaning up coffee spills. And to think of ourselves as that first-time visitor. And so we're asking ourselves the hard questions and it's not any fun because no one thinks they're unfriendly. No one thinks that they're, no one even wants to admit that they're not conveying the message. My test, really, frankly, has been University of Kansas professors, full PhDs who worship here, who believe what we believe, as in absolute truths, and the university that, frankly, doesn't portray that, as believing that all views are equal... and they've figured out how to survive in that environment and be very successful in their careers and so I use them, kind of, right now, that's what I'm weighing my messages against: 'how did I do compared to how you survived in the university setting?' And so far I'm getting good marks. And there are times when I've had to go back and re-think what I've said—it's usually the fact that I talk too fast, as opposed to that something I said wasn't understandable. But you know, if you talk fast, people listen better. Throw in a lot of humor in messages.

You know, so the challenge is, is you know, putting what we believe, that are absolutes, in terms that are recognizable and understandable by the greater community. And that's going to be an ongoing process because culture changes quick, you know? But for instance, we have a very active web-page. I think every church probably does now. We have facebook pages for our youth group, we have a facebook page for our church. You know, when I first came here I had lived on email with the adults at Veritas Christian School. I was working a lot with high school and college students at the time—they never responded to emails. But if I would text them at 3am, it was like Jesus just spoke because I got a text! And I can always get them to respond with a text. I'm getting those as we're sitting here from people, you know, assuming that I'm going to respond like they would. And so, you know, with younger folks, college students, I can print it in a bulletin announcement, we can make it a verbal announcement before service, and then they will call me and ask me what's going on. I'll say, 'well, we announced it. It's in the bulletin.' And then they will say, 'but I couldn't find anything about it on the website.' And if it wasn't on the website, it still wasn't quite true yet. It's just a new way of communicating, and whether we like it or not, that's reality.

And coming out of the Church of God—Church of God is still growing overseas—but, in the United States, it's dwindling, because they're not changing their styles. They're just not. And that's a shame. And you can, I guess, talk to a young man here and his father's a pastor in Texas. He says, 'I go back and nothing, nothing has changed since I was a teenager and now a church that was once vibrant is about seventy five.' And I think that's a shame. And for me, being fifty four years old, that's my challenge too. Because there's a lot of old, old-school stuff in me, and the goal is to keep the old-school and grow and change.

**Okay, well shifting gears just a little bit, so say I show up on Sunday for a service, what can I expect? What is it going to be like?**

Our worship is going to be contemporary, but it's.... it's going to be contemporary. We don't use a choir. We have a praise team. Just about everybody's doing that now, these days. We're going to sing some songs and if you listen to contemporary Christian radio, we're going to sing those songs. But we have found a very good balance of old and new. You know, we'll sing Amazing Grace and in the holidays, in particular, we're going to sing some of the old hymns. And they have a little bit of a fresh sounds, but they're going to be recognizable. I'm fifty four, but we, you know, have folks in the late eighties. This congregation, actually, is a very rich congregation, demographically. We have the full gamut, we're not just a young congregation. We have old folks who have embraced this view, which, I'm guessing in this community there are churches that have a lot more internal tension because of what we're trying to do here. That

generation older than me is embracing this. We're just not having to have those kinds of discussions why, and if we do, we satisfy those questions with our responses.

So if you come in, you're going to see a lot of worship that is not over-the-top edgy. By some standards it probably would be edgy, but for me, it really isn't over-the-top edgy. In fact, probably, my personal taste would be louder, bolder than even what we have. Words are going to be flashed up on the screen; we don't use hymnals anymore. If we sing a hymn, the words are up on the screen. We're going to use humor-drama for our announcements. We use humor and drama for our sermons. I will, habitually, in my Keynote—Powerpoint, we use Macs around here, so its Keynote—you're going to see a video clip in a lot of my messages. There's going to be a welcoming time where people get to interact for a few moments and maybe shake one another's hands. We challenge the regulars to move from their little circle. Some do that extremely well, some do not. And at the closing of our service, we tend not to give a dramatic invitation. There will be those occasions which we might, but communion is open. We leave that to, communion, first Sunday of the month. Anyone whose conscience allows them, and we really leave that to them to decide. We'll allow small children to take communion with their families, if their parents allow them to do that. Sometimes its because they are in the faith, so to speak, they've made a confession to faith. Or, taken a covental view from Passover, which is where communion came from, the whole family took it, young and old alike, and that's my orientation. And the Evangelical Free Church is specific in some areas, but not so specific to be divisive in evangelical areas, and it's an evangelical statement of faith, but not so specific to be come really all too divisive. Any evangelical would agree with our doctrine of faith and our goal is, while our service is really geared towards the believer—it is a believer's service, it's not a 'seeker' service, really. In my teaching style I try to have three shelves, to be totally honest. Something at the lower shelf, the middle for everyone, and then that more discerning student of the word. I don't do that to throw a bone out there, but I do it intentionally. But you know, if there's a nuance of a Greek phrase that some of the students of the word would know, and realize there's an issue there, I, very smoothly I can enter, I can put that in, whether its said in Hebrew, Greek, and or both. I mean, I can do that if I need to. Again, it's not to show what I am or what I'm not, it's with intentionality. But we do orientate more towards a believer's service. It would be really silly to purposely pretend like—we're not going to grow without visitors. We thought maybe we would grow more through small-groups and inviting people to come to their small-group and then bring them in to the larger, assimilate them that way. Let's face it, if you've got a small-group of twelve people, then, meeting in a home for a couple of months and you bring in a new family, that may be a tougher assimilation than someone coming into a worship service that has two hundred people in it. So we let the visitors stay autonomous at some levels, but you're going to get a gift—we're re-orienting our gift bag, which will have information in it, you know, the necessary ink-pen, you know. I think our gift bag is going to be including a Redbox free movie, a bucket of popcorn to pop, and skittles for the kids. And, I mean, that's what we're going at right now. If you came this Sunday, you wouldn't get that, but that's the plan.

We just, we're organizing a marketing committee that is really going to help us think through all of that. And I mean and really, intentionally think it all through. That anything we're doing, we know why we're doing it, and it's intentional. And if we can't really defend why we're doing it, we'll try not to do it. We really are. So we don't use the word 'program' around here. We use the word 'process' or 'steps.' You know, steps are things that you get to leave behind to go higher. Programs, for heaven's sakes, take on a life of their own. You can't kill a program. You just can't! I mean, hell, to kill a program is to kill a human being, sometimes. You know, you can't do that. So, we're changing terminology. And it's been positive. Processes and steps. If we do have a program, it's with an end in sight. And when we reach that end, then that program

stops so it's a process or a step. You can change steps. You can change processes. But you can't change a program.

You know I would not, frankly, when I was a visiting speaker, I would not have said that we were a friendly church, even as a guest. I really wouldn't have. And yet people tell us that we are a friendly church. So either something has changed in the last year and a half, or I don't think it's just me. When the church began to dwindle, they were taking a lot of things for granted, I think, at that point. And this church was very much of a 'come and see' and if you came, you could leave with no obligation. And we really are now moving from a 'come and see' to a 'go and get' orientation. That's what Jesus said to do anyway. And if attractive people won't show up, Jesus said go on the highways and the byways and find those least desirable, least attractive folks. I don't know who that really looks like, but in an unchurched culture, there is a whole lot of those folks that wouldn't—when I went into the ministry, well Billy and Mary had a fight in their marriage and one of those folks would usually end up in church asking for help and in our culture today that's not happening. And when Mary and [Billy]'s son Joe is getting in trouble, people used to call the pastor. And at least in this town, that's not the norm yet. There are a lot of other places they call, and we are one of many choices.

So I'm not afraid to use—even at Veritas—I use the word 'customer service' all the time. We're market-driven, we're consumers of things. People are making consumer-based decisions, and yeah, I don't think it compromises the gospel to adopt that terminology. The alternative is empty buildings. So... so find a better sword to fall on! Not that one.

**Okay, so I think we've been looking quite a bit at this external focus. So in terms of, also, that second part of the goal, being internally strong, how does that play out? You mentioned a little bit—**

Yeah, and that's a good question—

**--by putting some things into your sermons that would really strengthen those that are looking to grow—**

Well, we have a small group ministry—

**--and small groups, yeah, yeah.**

So we have small groups with trained leaders. Those groups reflect the personalities of those attending. The demographics are broad. Some of the groups are all couples with young children. A couple of the groups are ages twenty to eighty.

Then we also do something called Life Training for the adults, which others might call it Sunday school. We do Sunday school for the children, but it's Life Training for the adults. Yeah. And so right now we're emphasizing these double-pronged—the internally strong, externally focused—in our Life Training. We've been doing that, frankly, since January. But then we'll also do Sunday school and our nursery up through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. And we've got teachers for all those age groups. Then, during the worship time, the congregation worship time, we also then have children's church through third grade. After the worship—we have all the children worship with their parents and—it's a very smooth transition. We just take the offering and release the children and the leaders are waiting for them.

We have a group called C<sup>3</sup>, which is—I'm also a KU Religious Affiliate, which—so our C<sup>3</sup> group is, has the same acceptance and is in the same category as Campus Crusade for Christ, Intersity, Navigators, so, so C<sup>3</sup>. The University of Kansas has access to any room that we may need, which is great. So C<sup>3</sup>, you know, there's several things we do there. We have a luncheon, a free luncheon, for college students the first Sunday of every month, and it's really demographic of 18-30 because there's all different kinds of college students, graduate students, graduate assistants, part-time married students, all that. Some that have children, some that don't. We've got some key people that have led large campus-type ministries with us now, just recently starting at... came to the church. And we're thinking that our campus presence is really going to... and at one time this church was also the head church for Campus Crusade for Christ. Their offices were here. And that attracted a lot of college students. I couldn't exactly tell you why they moved out, I know they were asked to move out... there may have been rivalries? I mean, I'm sure you've never heard that in your interviews. Church people fight! But those offices moved to Grace Evangelical Presbyterian Church and are still there, I think. Though I'm friends with all those folks. And the Navigators do their praise and worship practice here on Wednesday nights. They actually have their meetings on campus, but we host their rehearsals on Wednesdays.

So, the internally strong, we sponsor Troop 53, which is the largest Boy Scout troop in the city. Lots of scouts. A lot of the landscape projects around the building, actually, are done by Eagle Scouts. So the recent landscaping was done by Eagle Scouts.

We have a prayer group meeting called PUSH on Wednesdays—Pray Until Something Happens. We have a Men's fraternity, we use, oh, I'm forgetting the man who founded Men's Fraternity—Ray Lewis. Ray Lewis... I believe that's his name. Anyways, so, that's a DVD series. One of our, our treasurer actually manages the Hampton. So men who come get a free breakfast at the Hampton and it starts at 6:30 and that's a great discipleship for men. We have semester women's groups that do a specific study that our women's leader does. And then we have another core group for women that are in chronic pain that is both outreach oriented and internally orientated. So we have some ladies that fibromyalgia... those kinds of difficult to define diseases that are just life-controlling sometimes. So those ladies meet as a support system, looking up both homeopathic cures and emotional cures, as well as, you know, medical solutions. And that has attracted women throughout the community struggling with the same thing. And the goal really isn't to convert them and bring them into our church, but again, to serve, you know? The community.

We host MOPS—Mothers of Pre-Schoolers—which is an independent organization, but we are the host of a new group. They were expecting about five or six this year, and they've been averaging thirty five or so, so they meet here twice a week and so we host them, again strengthening young families. But not everyone that comes to MOPS attends our church, in fact, I think only two—we have more MOPS that attend the original one over at the Free Methodist Church that attend here than actually attend this one because they were in the original group and haven't changed.

And then our youth group called Loud House. And we're now in the process of looking for a full-time person for that. And we have a group called FOG-456, which is on Wednesdays for 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup>-graders. Followers of God. Yeah.

**Cute, cute.**

It's probably the parents that are more in the fog than kids... but...

**Ok, well good. So in terms of how each of these groups are led-up, is it just people within the organization that feel called to it? Is there a specific leadership process? Or elders?**

Unfortunately, we're right now... I'm heading up about all of them.

**Geeze!**

But, but that's why, I'm probably drooling. We have a rule of two. So my goal is to find two people to lead all of those. I broke my arm patting myself on the back. Actually we do have that kind of leadership in all of those groups, and frankly, they're all very, very good at what they do. My job is to resource them, solve problems for them. I have a mantra, you know: be accessible, offer solutions, build relationships. Be accessible and offer solutions. That's kind of my leadership mantra. And so I'm there for them. If they need training, I look for that. Or will take, they'll go to seminars. We just went to a Sunday school teacher's convention. We have several families. We have a ten year old with Down Syndrome and other families with children with learning disabilities and so we're looking at how to mainstream... and some of those children, it's just hard for them to fit in. We have autistic—families with autistic children. It's just such a challenge. And that's often overlooked in church ministry, to be totally honest. So we think we've come up with a program to assimilate them into our Sunday school classes. Autism, in particular, keeps a lot of families from attending church. Or mom goes when dad stays home and vice versa. I mean, there are numbers of families that do that.

So the rule of two. And a non-member can be a leader if they go through a background check, go through an interview process, just checking qualifications and experience. And then we have them look at the EFCA statement of faith and make sure they agree with it. But, you know, in a transient—maybe not transient—but a mobile society like ours, people come and go. What we're striving with our campus ministry is not to have it be like an old high school, like a youth group—a college youth group. Oh, you know, Willow Creek the big church up in South Barrington did a re-visioning study and they discovered their 18-30 year olds did not know how to go to 'grown-up' church. That's what Bill Hybles has concluded. Somehow we didn't train 18-30 year olds how to go to big-boy church. We don't want that to happen. And they're re-visioning. They're re-doing everything at Willow Creek. And the current leaders we have, one young man, who's now an employee at the University of Kansas, led a campus church of eight hundred within a larger church in Norman, and he saw that. He just saw herding as opposed to shepherding. So we're really trying to re-orientate that way.

But the rule of two gives us two people to lead. That rule of two might be a couple, husband and wife, but still would need to be another person outside the family. And that's very healthy. You know, 'iron sharpens iron,' and balances each other. And in a mobile society, if somebody leaves, you've got a leader. The ministry doesn't die until they get another person to come in. And it's biblical. You know, Jesus sent people out two by two. So it's very biblical. It's been successful. But it's a re-orientation because, frankly, every ministry here had one person. And when that one person left, sheep without a shepherd stray. And I mean, it wasn't healthy for the church. And you just can't afford to waste too much while you're looking for a leader.

**Let's see... I, I was kind of bouncing around on the website last night and I saw an advertisement for tables for eight?**

Yeah.

**Tell me a little bit more—**

Well that's another... because we are now adding folks, say, our adult attendance is over two hundred now, there's probably three hundred that are coming and going. So we've got the core that was here when I got here, about a hundred and fifty? Or a hundred eighty? Depends on the account. And we've got groups of fifty that just exchange pews every week and so we weren't yet being successful in assimilating them into existing small groups. And so the goal through the Circles of Eight or Dinners of Eight is over the course of a year or a semester that there would be three or four times when--the people organizing that mix and match folks—and then they leave it to that group to get to know each other over a meal. And the goal would be that some small-groups will be spawned from that. Not everybody in that is already in the small-groups. Some of them signed up for dinner and aren't in a small-group. But I think we've got some members of small-groups that probably ought to be leading by now.

Some just love their small group, I mean they've buried children through that group and married children through that group, they went through divorce within that group... I mean, it would be silly for me to split those groups apart. It would just be dumb. I mean, that would really be dumb! So that's what the Dinners of Eight is. One more way for us to assimilate. We don't want it to become a 'program,' that's my nervousness, and right now it's being treated a little bit like a program. You've got to count that we want to serve you. No one needs one more thing to do. So we're trying to be very intentional, making sure people know why we're doing that.

You know, I learned at Veritas when I would go to seminar and come back with a new idea, if I didn't pull something off the bottom that wasn't working, it was silly for me to bring in a new idea. In fact we actually got a book by Andy Stanley, I just thought of this, *The Seven Practices of Effective Ministry*, and so some of the terminology that I've used, frankly, is adopted from that book. I wish I could say that all those are our thoughts. But I used it also at Veritas and it worked very well there. And again, we're not the ones who thought of that. Some day I'll think of something original and write a book about it, but so far I'm a really good learner and reader from everyone else's good, best practices.

**Well it sounds like you have your hands tied with plenty of things already!**

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

**Well good deal. Well we're definitely closing in on an hour here, possibly over, I haven't been watching to closely on the clock, here. But um, are there any stories or any memories that you would want written down about your time here?**

In Lawrence, Kansas? Goodness. Well, you know, some of mine are not all that happy. Frankly, though, I'm thrilled to be here and see the growth... yeah, I moved here in 2004 and, if you were around here in those days, our—the board president of Veritas School murdered his wife two weeks after I got here. And being a Christian school in a liberal-orientated community, we were attacked immediately. Because, right? Every Christian murders his wife. I mean, I remember looking out my window and the arm of a newspaper reporter, you know, the TV camera would be looking through my window on Michigan, looking through my office, trying to get a picture of me.

**Oh my gosh.**

I had reporters coming in, pretending—I mean, this guy knows who he is, he was an LJ World reporter—came in posing as a policeman. And he really did. And to try—thank goodness, the story wasn't at Veritas and had nothing to do with Veritas, but they were, I think there were people subtly hoping that it would be. I do. And the following year we had a young lady who died playing the choking game within our school. And that made national headlines. The family was on Oprah and talked about the choking game. Are you familiar with that? You know. And so those are not necessarily the happy memories.

The exciting memories are things like the Martin Luther King Day events that I've been a part of. Seeing those things happen. And seeing evangelicals meeting together—blacks and whites. Where at, I have a good friend, Johnny Morris, who I mentioned to you, working with First Nations folks at Haskell. We've had Johnny here and speak. My son Micah was the worship leader for Fellowship of Christian Athletes on the campus for a while. And you know, those are all tremendous, tremendous victories.... To see that kind of working together.

And it's to see... to go back to some of our, what I was saying about the Southern Baptist and Evangelical Free Church, when I came, I said, 'you know, we probably just need to just decide who we are.' And so we did drop the Southern Baptist affiliation. And it was ironic. In a world that people don't tend to look for denominations, they do, frankly, look for a pastor that they want to listen to. Or a ministry that their family needs. When we decided to not be Southern Baptists, there were a few folks that were here because we were Southern Baptists and so they left. And to see us coming to find ourselves, and deciding to stay with that, it brought confidence with those that have stayed. And so when people come, we know who we are, so we can tell them who we are. And that's been really, really helpful.

The other thing is, having been a part of Veritas, I've found a very vibrant Christian community in this city. Because we were a non-denominational school, thirty different churches were either sending their children or we had teachers that were coming to that school. That's, that's... I don't think we had any more than eight students, at that time, from any one church in the city. And I think we had a hundred sixty five students, which isn't a large school. So you can see it was very broad-based, which helped it survive when our board president did what he did, and when the student did what happened to her. And that broad base really made it a bump—a speed bump—but not a closed door. And I've seen a very vibrant Christian community. The LAE, Lawrence Association of Evangelicals, has been very positive for me to be chosen to lead it these past couple years.

A victory for us, I'll be honest, for evangelicals was... it may be offensive to some... well, we have a domestic registry for same-sex couples. There was an effort to bring some, I think, some non... some short-sided protections for transgender and crossdressing. And we were able to stop a particular ordinance, which I thought was beneficial for the cities in the area in terms of litigation. You know, a man dressed as a woman who goes into a women's restroom—and I know not all of them are molesters—but to be honest, it would expose the city to a lot of potential litigation and would force us to put in a third bathroom. You know, you'd have your family bathroom and then your male and female. And we just couldn't afford to do that. Not many businesses could. And Manhattan, Kansas, which would not have ever been considered Lawrence, just, you know, their human relations commission just passed unanimously and was given to the city commission. And I'm working closely with those guys over there to help them maybe see if they can't, in my mind, bring a voice of logic to that. We would—I have had a



ministry in the past called Freedom's Call to Gay Men and Women. While I don't approve of that behavior, neither do I approve of gluttony. So, I work closely with gays and lesbians... embrace them. But, work to minister to them the love of Christ. Just like I would someone who comes in and says, you know, 'I'm living on coffee and cocoa,' which I don't think is healthy either!

So, to me, those are victories. Now not everybody in Lawrence would describe that victory before the human relations commission a victory, but to the evangelical mind, I think most would. And to be honest, if they didn't, they should. In my view! You know, but in what I just said, therein lies our dilemma as an evangelical church. You've gotta be careful. So we couch those arguments in secular, legal terms. I think there was one church who held up their Bible and said 'it's just wrong! It's just wrong.' And while I would agree with that, I don't think that argument is the way to win hearts and minds. So, in those cases, when I spoke, and others, we looked at it from constitutional means and legal means, as opposed to something that would take on a more emotional bit.

Did I start rambling too much there?

**No you're good! I like being able to get as many stories as you're willing to share.**

Well, yeah...

**Well good, I suppose I will let you get back to your busy day of work.**