

Larry Wren

Café Campus Pastor and Executive Pastor

Pathway Church; Wichita, KS

Interviewed by Emily Stratton at Pathway Church's Welcome Center

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Transcribed by Emily Stratton

Abstract: Pathway Church is a well-established non-denominational church in Wichita, Kansas. Though originally planted in 1959 as Westlink Christian Church, the church underwent major changes in 2003, with the opening of its new campus (a 'megachurch' facility) and a change in its name to Pathway Church. Shortly following these changes and with increased growth in church attendance, Pathway began to try to focus less upon its megachurch, programmatic, or "shopping mall" aspects. Instead, church leadership sought to emphasize more home group activity and also change some of the "forms and functions" of running the church's services. Though many changes are still in discussion, one change that came into fruition in 2012 was the development of what Pathway calls the "Café Campus." Though the Café Campus takes place within the same building facility as Pathway's "Westlink Campus" and shares the same children's programs, the Café Campus has its own pastoral staff, its own tech team, its own worship band, and its own set of volunteers. There, it takes on a less traditional atmosphere than the Westlink Campus's services and is also scaled down in size.

This interview is with Larry Wren, long-time member and leader in Pathway—now also the Café Campus Pastor. The interview focuses upon the establishment and implementation of the Café Campus as a branch of Pathway, and some of the development strategies and challenges regarding shifting Pathway into a multi-site church.

Note: Interview questions by Emily are written in **bold** type, Pastor Larry's responses are in regular font.

So it's June 16th, 2013, and I'm sitting at Pathway Church with Pastor Larry Wren who is this church's Café Campus pastor. And now that I've had this introduction spiel, we'll just go ahead and get started. So, Larry the first thing that I'd want to be able to get from you is—since I haven't heard this from you yet either—just a little bit of a background about who you are as a person, where you grew up, where you came from, how you got connected into the ministry...

Mhmm. I actually grew up here, in Wichita, in this church. This church was planted from another church in the inner-city in Wichita in 1959. My parents were in that church. They moved out here and were a part of the leadership core that planted this church. I grew up here... never really ever expected to come back here. I accepted Christ when I was about nine years old. So, it's been a great journey.

When I went to school at Kansas State University at a small Christian College there—it was a joint degree program, a Christian college, it was called Manhattan Christian College. I finished, and I started a career in business at Kansas State, but after a couple semesters, I really felt that God was leading me into more of a church-related ministry. And both my parents had been strong church leaders, so I certainly had that heritage. And it was a good heritage, but I really

didn't think I wanted to do that. But then, I really felt like God changed my heart, or developed that in me when I was in college.

So took my first church in Colorado. Met my wife there in 1979. We got married in 1980 and served a church out there for three and a half, and then moved back in 1992. I was Children's Pastor here for ten years, and then I did just a ton of stuff all over—most other areas of the church, except for student ministries. I became Executive Pastor in 1996 or 1997, been in that role since then, and when we launched the Café Campus last year, I agreed to be the campus pastor in addition to my other responsibilities. So, I've been here a long time. I say I know where all the bodies are buried and, you know, I tell people I'm old as dirt. So I've been here thirty—it's been thirty one years in April, which is kind of unusual.

Yeah, that's kind of a long time to be here. Awesome, well that's perfect; you'll have a lot of perspective that you can lend in terms of where the Café Campus came from. So, within the church and being here for a while, can you talk to me a little bit about the vision of how the Café Campus came about and how it took shape... when... etc. I know you already mentioned it was last year, but...

There is a movement in evangelical Christianity—a strategy called multi-site churches. And, we really sensed that that was a good direction for us... a change, several years ago. So we put together a plant—well, it's not really a church-plant. The difference between a church-plant, which is how this church was originally started, and a multi-site campus is that a lot of times in a church plant, what you do is you send out a bunch of people, or you might send out just one person, and “we'll pay your salary for a year! Have at it! God bless ya, hope it goes well!” But the multi-site is more like a franchise. So you're familiar with that. So anyways, we launched our first multi-site campus in Goddard, which in 2010, 2011, I think still is the fastest growing city in Kansas. It's not very far from here. Went really well. This was a year ago in February, and we really were wanting to launch another campus, but we weren't quite sure where.

Because—we have about 300 high school kids in our high school ministry. They meet here, they used to meet here during the same service time. But we thought, if we start other campuses, that's not something we can replicate—that size of ministry, on every campus. So, we wanted to have a central place where they could come back, and kind of have a large youth group. So, we moved our high school ministry to Sunday night last July. And then we weren't sure where the next campus was going to be, but we thought, ‘well we've got this wonderful space in here that is now vacant during a prime time on Sunday when people—that's the, people still, they want to come to church on Sunday morning. All of the research and the surveys say that. So, we said, let's start the Café Campus.

And one of the things we tried to do, rather than just set up another venue... you know a venue would just be, “well, we're going to go over here and it's going to be a different setting and it's going to be, you know, might be trying to reach a different group of people, might not be, but it's kind of, it's simultaneously going on. Which in essence is what we've done, but we tried to start it with the strategy of starting a new campus.

So what we said, and what we announced last June, is to be a part of the Café Campus, you have to agree like we did when we started the Goddard Campus... “you've got to agree to attend the Café, you've got to be a member of Pathway, you've got to be in a small group, and you've got to be willing to serve in some way, plus invite your friends. If you don't want to do that, God bless you, but stay over here in the other room.”

We didn't have to do that, and when we've started other services before, we have not done that. But what happens when you do that, those people have a real ownership over what we're doing.

So, we have a separate Guest Ministries group. You know, you talked to Gwendolyn last night, and she works with that. Well, she's in charge of everything that goes on in there. But there's a whole separate team over here. We have a separate Worship & Arts Teams, and there's a core of about 120 volunteers, and they rotate—two weeks on, two weeks off—the people that run and serve the coffee and that sort of thing. They really own what we're doing.

If we just opened the door and said y'all come, we probably would have had a good crowd, but they wouldn't have really owned what we're trying to do, which is our mission, which is to reach new people.

But the interesting thing, and one of the reasons I wanted you to come last night and this morning, is so you could see and experience the difference. It's the same sermon. Same kinds of music, I mean, musical style, a little bit different groups, you know, because they rotate.... But it's a whole different feel in this room over here. People like this in here. They like the smaller feel—it's more intimate. They like sitting around tables. They like—I think the coffee... being able to bring stuff in is a win. But I think the bigger win is it just feels more... it's more informal; it's more welcoming.

So I think the interesting thing is, you're looking in, you know, you saw young people. You saw people with kids. And then you saw older people too. And so it's not just.... I think I was surprised... how much we're doing the very same thing—the same sermon, the same order—but it feels totally different in there. And people like it.

So, I mean that's kind of been the stretch. And what you'll find, I think a lot of churches—contemporary evangelical churches—are building sites that look kind of like this. We're getting ready to build a building out at Goddard, well hopefully in the next couple of years. And, it will be much more like [the Café Campus] space than [the Westlink] one. So that's kind of in a nutshell....

But we've tried to use the strategy... same strategy we did as planting a campus off-site as we did onsite. That doesn't work quite as well because, for instance, we use the same children's ministry here as where out at Goddard, they've got to set up their whole.... And their set-up crew, they're out there at six o'clock on a Sunday morning in order to transform a school into a... and it's a, it's an awesome... and people are very surprised when they go out there how cool it looks.

But we're... anyways, so it's not quite an apples-to-apples comparison, but the goal was we wanted people to own the mission, because if we're not inviting and... the problem with the large setting is that we live in such a consumer-driven culture. And one of the great things about a large church, is we're large and we can provide lots of stuff. One of the bad things about a large church, is we're large and we can provide lots of stuff. So people look at it as kind of like going to the mall. For years, we thought of ourselves as "the shopping mall church," you know "we're going to do it all! We've got sports groups, a counseling center, we've got preschool..." And one of the things we're seeing: we get these... our vision to start other sites is "let's just do the basics well. We're not going to replicate all these things." So... it's weekend services. It's groups. It's serving.

So that's kind of the.... And we're trying to transition an older--although, in some respects we're not all that old, and in other respects, we are—a more established church into a new paradigm. It's why we changed the name. We didn't want... the name before was Westlink Christian Church. The term "Westlink," and although most people didn't know it that way, um.... it's a neighborhood. It's a neighborhood subdivision. And we didn't want people out at a Goddard campus or maybe a campus up north or in Valley Center to feel like this was the most important campus or feel like they couldn't relate to that name, because it implied a geographic location. And then, the other reason that we took Christian out of the name, which was very controversial—this was one of the most contro... it was kind of, it's somewhat about appearances. But it was very controversial. The reason we took it out is because in some sections of our culture, you know there's a growing, I'll call it kind of an anti-Christian move, and we thought, "we don't have to use that." And we told people the term Christian, you know, originally was a derogatory term used by the Romans in the first century. So, but it, you know it's amazing how you, you know, you can change... we talk about 'forms and functions,' you know, we try and... and we try to fall in love with our forms rather than our functions.

So... blah blah blah! I'll stop so you can ask another question.

Yeah! No no no, it's good. You can 'blah blah blah' as long as you want. I'm always interested in hearing what kinds of, you know, directions you'll take it in. But I am really interested in hearing more about some of those transitions and those changes that you're making from being kind of a more programmatic modeled church to trying to connect people... and you mentioned that there were these challenges in the name, but also... what kind of challenges have you faced in terms of making transitions? As I'm looking around I'm seeing touch screens on the walls and a very kind of tech-savvy movement. Have there been any... has it been a pretty smooth transition? Has it been a little bit harder for some of the people that have been here for a while? Or, what have you seen?

Well we, I think we... we have made a lot of change, which has been hard for people. And we've had a few people leave—not very many, but a few just... the reality is it was just one more change that they didn't want to face. Not and, you know we try to dialogue people. Many of the things we did in the main change, I think were right and were good. There were some things I'd of done differently, if we look back. We try and, you know, prepare people for change. And we always... I think one of the things that's different is where in ten, fifteen years ago we were probably a little more programmatic-minded, and we think of ourselves as more mission-driven. At least, we're working in that direction.

So, you know, I don't think the tech has been much of.... We moved into this building in 2003. We moved from where we were land-locked over on Tyler Rd., which is not very far from here. I think we were a large church over there. But when we moved over here, people realized "oh wow, we really are a large church." I mean, it's like people got it finally. Not that that was a bad thing, but it did create a sense of "I don't know if I want to be in a large church... part of a mega-church." And so...

There's a book that we've used in the last couple years called *Simple Church*, which is kind of a direction that we've tried to move. We think about really following Jesus. We changed our slogan. We were "Westlink Christian Church: The Family Place." Which we still... you saw a lot of families here. That hasn't changed. But we said, "we want to stay focused on what our mission is." We're really not about a religion. We're about following Jesus. We think the words

“following Jesus” is ... that’s more of a movement than it is an organization or a religion. And, we have to do that in community. That, you know, we were never designed to follow Jesus in isolation. And the third part is serving, and that carries all kinds of ramifications. So that’s... we’ve kind of, you know, redesigned that.

And I think people received that pretty well. I think it’s... I don’t think it’s too much... or one of... did you notice our group of people out here this morning? That’s been kind of a phenomenon. A lot of people, you know, these people didn’t move, you know, when we opened the Café Campus, they didn’t move from this place to over there. They really like kind of being more of a spectator out here. And we’ve tried to allow for that. Sometimes it’s people... they don’t like the loud music. Sometimes they don’t... it’s dark in there. They don’t like that. I think probably the music is the biggest complaint. And then some of the people just aren’t ready to go in there: “that’s a step that I’m just not quite ready to take.” But it’s interesting. Probably during the 9:00 and 10:45 services, probably have about sixty five folks out here.... Almost at every place in eye of a TV, where they can watch somebody sitting there.

Emily interjects: Mhmm, yeah. I was one of those spectators this morning. I was sitting over at that table here and thought, “wow, there’s a lot more people out here than I expected!”

Pastor Larry: Well, yeah! And it’s grown, I would say. And you know, we’ve kind of, we serve... as you saw, we serve communion out here—I don’t know how much they actually pass the offering plate around out here or not...

Emily interjects again: yeah, it was passed around.

Pastor Larry: We try and help ‘em engage and you know, that’s okay if they’re not quite ready to do that.

So yeah... change, and change is not going to stop. You know, we’re going to see more change... and just try to help people get used to the fact that, you know, we are on a mission. And if you’ve read another book that’s probably fairly influential for us is Jim Collins’ book, *How the Mighty Fall*. Have you read any of Jim’s stuff?

Emily answers: I haven’t.

Pastor Larry continues: His other book is *From Good to Great*, that was probably his most well... Anyways, in his... I don’t know if it was his last book, but a book he wrote several years ago, *How the Mighty Fall*, he talks about the research he did at major companies. Now when a company—he talks about the bell curve—when a company gets to be a certain point—they’re very successful, they’ve done very well, what happens, if they aren’t careful, they’re going to start down the other side of the bell curve and be in denial. They’re really in decline, but they’ve kind of... I think we were fearful that was happening to us because... in churches, you know, when churches get to be forty or fifty years old, they’ve got to re-tool themselves if they’re going to continue to be effective in the next generation and for the next fifty years. So that’s... we’re fifty... fifty nine... we’re fifty four years old this year. So, I think we felt like that was an important thing.

If you... the biblical example we would use for that: in the book of, or in the New Testament, if you read through the book of Acts, the book of Ephesians, or the church at Ephesus was the biggest, most glorious, most prominent church that Paul started and it, of course he wrote the letter to the Ephesians, but in the first or second chapter of Revelation where the vision that God

gave to John that he put down on paper, it talks about the church at Ephesus, who's about, about forty years later, it's lost its first love. So that was one of the examples. We said, we have got to continue to change.

Another huge problem in the church to day, in any culture... well, I'll just say any religion, is that because we're living longer, you've got multiple generations. So that creates challenges. A lot of churches have, you know, they've got the traditional service, then they've got the contemporary service, then they've got the blended, or they have others... we've kind of chosen that at least at this point—that doesn't mean that we would never do that—but... the problem with that... it kind of becomes divisive. You know, it's like, "I'm not going to go to that contemporary service, I've got my service." But in the traditional service, what you find is that it doesn't grow. It doesn't reach people. People, they're looking for God. They're not going to come to that service.

So we've opted, for instance, we're, you know if you've noticed in the Café service, we're... what we try and do every week, at every service, is a hymn. It might be done in a little bit more of a contemporary way, but we try and do that because we know there's a generational thing. And so that's one of the ways that we try to do things that would speak to multiple generations.

Emily interjects: Yeah, I was going to say, on "It is Well With My Soul," I heard some people really belting it out.

Pastor Larry: Because they know it!

Emily responds: yeah, it connects with them.

Pastor Larry: Yeah! And then you'll have new people say, "wow, that was a really neat song!" And I think, "well, it's a hundred and fifty years old..." hahaha! So learning how to do that.

Good, so yeah, I want to hear a little bit more about, in terms of the shape that the Café Campus took. You talked a little bit earlier about when it came about, and a bit of the vision behind it. But in terms of making it more casual, in terms of having the tables there and changing up the lighting—I saw the designed lighting up on the walls—um, how did the vision for that take place? And what made you guys want to kind of change it up from what's going on at the Goddard campus or what's going on in the Westlink Campus?

I think, in some respects, the venue, if you will, helped give shape to the vision. Because we built both our children's space and our youth space and they give... the philosophy was a little bit different five or six years ago. It's a destination space. And they still are, you know. But, and so, because of that... kind of a more industrial look, you know, it's gaming stations, it's casual... it says, "come in!" And we try to create space where people are more comfortable sitting down and visiting. Meeting someone. Less formal. We've determined.... That was okay, you know. I wouldn't, for instance, if you saw me last night, I had on this shirt, but I had on a pair of dress slacks and dress shoes. And, it's kind of funny. And but this morning, you know, I wore my jeans and shirt because we just want to be a little bit more relaxed.

And we may... we're talking about doing that in the Worship Center. We've tended to say we're still dress-business-casual on Sunday, except for our children and student staff, and we're trying to decide philosophically: "okay, are we going this route because we don't want to dress up? Or

is it because it's really going to help people feel more comfortable?" You know, we use that kind of... "so guys, there's a lot of barriers between me" and we talk about people.... Is that true of teachers in school? Is their dress a barrier? Probably not if they relate well. But, we also talked about the fact that sometimes you have a different relationship as a student to a teacher than a pastor. So we're trying to weigh that through. But, I think that was an attractive thing. I think there was a tendency of some of our members, where people wanted to be "well, we need to do something different, we need the music more edgy, we need to, you know, kind of go crazy on the lights" and we said, "no, let's not do that."

One of the things we see for this venue is that it does create an opportunity for others to cast a vision for other sites. So we're hoping to start another campus, probably next year. Probably in the fall of 2014 to the north. There's a good core of people who live north, who we think will be a part of that core. So, the Café venue also... we... we're not doing this very well yet, but we... our vision is that it would also be kind of a training ground for people who could be campus pastors, for people who could be tech people, music people, missions... you know. So we tried to start.

So in essence, we're kind of seeing ourselves as a mini-denomination. The reality is that when a church gets to be the size that we are, you don't... you kind of do your own thing, no matter what denomination you're a part of. So, you know, and we're still talking about how much freedom do we give other campuses? We really want to do something in the inner city. You know, if we do that, it's going to have to be very different. It may not be video-driven. But we're not ready to do that. We'd like to get one or two or three of these suburban deals down and figure them out.

But the vision for the Café is "okay, we can run... try some different people as hosts." And we feel like the hosts... because you've got the video... and I would say people love the video. That's interesting, as out at the Goddard campus, they've had more... it was more of a struggle. We did a couple... we did three incubation services in the gym before we started the Goddard campus. We set up the video and they did all that stuff, and one of the things that helped us get ready for video is, you know, just you saw the big screens in the other room. And if you're sitting up in the stadium seating, you're not watching the little guy on the stage, you're watching the guy on the screens. So, that helps prepare people. So that's kind of part of it.

I would say... I think people are... people like... they like the seating. You know, if I come in with my kids, and we've got something to eat, we can sit around a table, which is kind of helpful if you've got kids. We've gone with the three different... one, we didn't have enough tables and chairs to put little café tables around for everyone. Plus that limits how many people you can get in there, so that's why we went with the three different kinds. I'm surprised with how well the big tables worked! And then, of course, people also like the... you'll see those café tables fill up first. And then people are... the rows of chairs fill up last, I would say. I don't know if that's really true because I'm up front and I'm not really watching that carefully, but I think people like that variety. If they want to sit in a row, they can sit in a row.

But you know, we're not... and this is true of Goddard's ministry... you know, we're not trying to start a men's ministry, or a women's ministry, or a single's ministry. We have some of those things that happen [in the Westlink Campus], but we're saying, "if you're going to be in the Café, first you need to be a follower of Jesus, we want to help you take that step, you know, we want you in a group, we want you serving." That's... and we just hit that over and over and over again.

So, I was trying to think of other vision kinds of things... but we basically said, “what’s... what we’re doing here is working really well. So we don’t need to do something different to attract people.

One of the challenges of Wichita is it... this is not a great place if you’re single, or after college or up in your twenties. In fact Cargo, one of the major corporations around here would say that if they send somebody over here that’s single and move them in here to work for Cargo, they’re lucky if they last a year. Now, if they’re married and have a couple of kids, this is one of the top three or four places in the country, from their perspective.

So, we don’t have a lot. You know, like, Lawrence, or even over in Manhattan... now, WSU’s on the other side of town... I was talking with another friend of mine that’s an African American pastor, and he was talking about, they’re going to start a hip-hop church just two blocks from campus later this summer. I’m real excited to see how that’s going to go. I don’t know if it’s going to be multi-site or what. But that’s kind of the thing everybody’s trying these days. So...

Yeah. I want to go back, very briefly, to mentioning that people in the Café Campus really like having the video. I was surprised to hear that, I had thought, “I wonder... how to people respond to having a recorded sermon every time instead of having a pastor up there?” And so to hear that it was something that people received pretty well, I was interested in hearing... when you’re looking at the future of the Café Campus, as well as the Goddard Campus, and other ones that you’ll be planting in the future, are you... is having those video services a part of that vision as well? Or I know you were kind of toying around with “well, how much freedom do you give them?” Or... I was just wondering if the teaching is always going to be the same for each of those sites.

At this point, it would be... that it would never change is probably not, I mean I don’t know. But at this point, our strategy is video. It’s one of the ways that we keep everybody connected.

And today... we’ve never had this happen like it happened today. Steve, he... his prayer and call for people to make decisions was probably a bit long last night, and it was kind of confusing. And so like to day, you know, at the end of the service, normally what happens is when that prayer is over, they cut the video. But because of the way... they knew there was kind of going to be a two-part thing, and they weren’t sure... so that was a horrible transition.

We’ve worked really hard to get the pastors to keep from saying “tonight,” and, you know, just to talk about [the Westlink] Campus, and most... and it’s gotten a lot better... but people, yeah. There’s some people that come... the guy up at the Goddard campus, he gets a lot of feedback—it’s mostly positive. People have gotten used to the video. But he says, if there’s something wrong, he gets more negative feedback. I’ve hardly ever had any negative feedback.

And I don’t know. There’s some difference here. If people don’t like it, they can come back over [to the Westlink Campus]. We have a lot of people that go, “well, I’ve never been over to the Café Campus. I’m going to come try that out this week.” But, you know. But it’s mostly, again, with very little effort, we’re filling the place.

We run 280 up to 350, and when we get up over 320, 325, it’s probably pretty crowded, which is the tendency. You know, they say, you got 80% capacity, people feel like there’s not room.

So, but yeah. The video's been... we've worked really hard at it... there have been a few times that they've had to re-record it at the first service and then run it out to Goddard and run it over here and... but like this morning, and you know, we talked about it afterwards. I talked to the tech people... and it's partly on me. We knew that it was kind of weird at the end, but we didn't go through and look at it to see exactly... so we would know when to cut it off. And so we'll talk about that. We'll have a debrief tomorrow afternoon... we spend half hour talking about how it went at all the campuses and then we'll plan for the next weekend.

So, but yeah. The video's been very... there's some churches around the country that have started with total video. There is a church in Amarillo... this boggles my mind. They probably run four to five thousand, similar to us, and they have a number of multiple sites and some small communities. You know, Amarillo's in the middle of nowhere. Lubbock is about two and half hours south of there, maybe farther than that. But they decided to start another campus there because that was the place where they had the most internet traffic. People were watching it online.

They started a church a year ago, and they started with 1,500. And it's video.

So, yeah, there's something about... you know, we were getting ready to go to the Cotton Bowl. K-State was getting ready to play Arkansas and I'd never been to Texas Stadium, they've got this huge mega screen. And you're sitting there... you're not watching the game, you're watching the video. So... why would that not work at church?

Interesting. Um... in terms of bringing people to the Café, back when it was first launched—I remember you mentioning that the volunteers that you had being a part of that campus and had moved over from the Westlink Campus—part of the commitment was to talk to friends and work on kind of just word of mouth, bringing people in. How else did people start coming to it? How much was cross-over from Westlink? Or was there a wide variety of new people coming in? Or what would you say?

It was mostly people from [the Westlink] Campus.

We've had new people come, and I think it's an easier place for new people to come on our campus. You know, we've had... I don't have a lot of good numbers, anecdotally, we saw, you know, a gal that's been a part of our church here and has done a lot of ministry—been around for probably twenty years. Her husband would never come much. He wasn't into it... well, he's come over here because he says, "I just really like it." You know, it's an easier place to come to church. And, so you hear stories like that.

When we started, you know, we saw a few people today that had Café shirts on. We gave all the core... if you agreed to be a part of the core you got a free shirt... so we did that. We gave mugs, big coffee mugs to people, we um... so we did some of those kinds of things.

But we've tried to emphasize... really, our marketing plan is to—it's word of mouth. We say, you know, God's plan is... your plan A there is no plan B. You know, it's really the whole message of the Bible again. But it's up to us to share that message, and so we try and reinforce it. And it's not that—we try and do some marketing. We're doing a big project for the community this fall. We're going to try to give 3,000 full... you saw that, the backpack thing? You seen that?

Emily interjects: No, I haven't.

Pastor Larry continues: ...we didn't talk about it today, but 3,000 backpacks to kids in schools all over the community. We have some neighborhood schools that will get some of those, but then we've adopted five schools in the inner-city of Wichita which are greater than 93% free and reduced lunch. And we're trying to build a relationship with those schools. But the way we're... the thing that's really different about it is—as we want people to be in groups—we're doing it through our groups. So if you're in my home team, then—I don't know if they've started, then the next week or the week after, we're going to be talking about the home team—because what we're going to do is, “I want you, and all of us in our home team, we're going to decide what night, and we're going to canvas our neighborhoods. So, we've got a little door hanger... and invite people in our neighborhoods to give to this project, you know, to bring some... and we'll have a designated night when people are going to bring their school supplies to a park or some, some neutral zone, and we're going to have hotdogs or something and just maybe some of those people will get acquainted, but it's trying to mobilize—but part of the strategy is, we want our people out there inviting people. And so this is a great way to meet a community but also to meet one of our goals.

And then, but we always try to ask ourselves the question as a church, “okay, would there be anything lost in the community if we weren't here. Are we making a difference, apart from our mission?” So that's, you know, one of the things we're trying to do with that. But it's kind of exciting. We'll see how it works, if we can get our home teams mobilized in that way. So we're basically saying—up until the very end, we're saying—“you gotta be in a home team to be a part of this project.” You know, we want people to feel like they're missing something. And I think, you know, the last week or two, we'll probably let people bring stuff... because, see again, in our culture that's something, the easy thing, and “I'm going to write a check” or “I'll bring a bunch of stuff” or kind of check the box and haven't had to relate to anybody, haven't had to, you know... so... we're always fighting that tendency.

So then in the projects, like the 3,000 backpacks one, is that something that all of the campuses are sharing together?

Pastor Larry interjects: Yes.

So each one will have their own home teams that will then contribute to the larger project?

Yes, mmmm, mmmm, yeah. And there... you know, we'll do some... again... the Goddard campus actually piloted this last year. And it worked so well for them. And they just did it for Goddard schools, so we're expanding it.

And that's one of the challenges... as we get larger and we have other campuses, again it goes back to this: “what are we going to replicate? And how do we avoid... We don't want [the Westlink] campus to be seen.” We don't use the terms like “mothership” or “main campus” or “the big campus,” but I mean we're really... it's hard. And it's hard for my staff here, because [the Westlink Campus] is so much a part of who they are, and they tend to only think about this campus.

As we get another second and third campus, it'll be easier, and we will develop a staff here that we'll call "Central Services." They'll be much more geared in that direction. But that's one of our biggest challenges now.

For instance—I'll give you a for instance—last week we had six hundred kids in day camp and another three hundred kids here for vacation Bible school. The day camp's for elementary kids and it's out at a little recreation place, that's about a mile away. And [the staff]... they weren't thinking and they... and, of course, it's for the Goddard kids too... So what happened was, they were making everybody come here [to the Westlink Campus] to pick up their packets. Well then that reinforces, somehow, that this is the big place, this is...

So... it's one of the things when they debrief... things like that, where people just don't think. And while it was easier for the people directing day camp, "well, we're not doing such and such..." because it's easy for them, but is it best for the people we're trying to reach?

So... anyways, I don't remember what the question was, but uh...

No, no, you're totally fine. And then going back to the home groups, as well, since the Café Campus and the Goddard Campus are relatively new breakaways, for the people who are in home groups, was there also kind of a split in home groups? Or did home groups kind of stay, so that you might have someone from each campus in that home group? Or, how did that work?

Well, what our original goal was, was to get people that were in existing home teams—in fact, I spent a lot of last summer going and meeting with groups and saying "hey, how about coming, all of you, and being a part of the Café?" That didn't work very well. It was hard for groups to make that decision as a group. So we have... I think we have nine or ten home teams in the Café that are strictly Café people. But there's probably another ten—maybe more—groups, like the group I'm in, there's some Café people in it and some Westlink Campus people. And so that's been a little bit... it'll be interesting to see how this project works. The good news is we're doing it at all of the campuses, so we'll see. But, ideally... and we're not... we're trying to encourage people that are new to the Café to get involved in a Café-only home group. We don't want them in a mixed group, although that would be better than to not be in a group at all. So we're basically only promoting those groups, but again... the best way to get in a group is if someone invites you, so that's the higher value. But yeah, it's a little bit of a challenge.

We're having a challenge more with our high school kids on that. Because it's been a high value here at the Westlink Campus—small groups are a big part of our student ministry. And so, they like to have groups that have kids from several high schools. The Goddard High School, Maize High School, and other Wichita schools. And that's kind of been a high value not to allow groups to one school. And part of that—they're trying to build a sense of unity. But here we are, out at Goddard, trying to connect people, and our Goddard people connect... and so, there's been a little bit of tension there, trying to figure out, "how do we do that?"

And so... it's not quite as... right now it's more intense at the student level. But I think that, you know, there are a few home teams at the Westlink Campus, I think, that still have Goddard people, that are a part of the Goddard campus there. So there's some of that. But they just don't work as well. You know what I mean? And so, we would like to move away from that.

But again, it's more important for people to be in a group, so, that's kind of a... that kind of trumps what we want.

So then, this might put you slightly on the spot, or not really on the spot, but a jumble to think really quickly... do you have any memories that stick out in your mind, or any great stories that should go on the book from your time with working with the Café? Or anything that I wouldn't be able to formulate a question about without having been there?

One of the awesome things for me, both for the Goddard campus and—I try and get out there once a month, but I haven't been out there much recently, because the guy, the Goddard campus pastor reports to me—and it's true over here, where we've not had quite the same experience. We have a little bit more of a security blanket over here because we're right by [the Westlink Campus], you know.

But, a couple things happened last summer.in this month of June. One of them... we had a guy out at the Goddard Campus, his wife works with our guest ministry team, and they had been part of the campus here, but they were a part of the Goddard launch. Well he came down with Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. They didn't know what it was for two weeks and he was in a coma and unresponsive a couple weeks. It took him about six weeks to get home. And he actually... a year later he's still not... he may never totally return. But, I mean, you wouldn't know anything by talking to him. But anyway, the way the folks at that campus reached out to him and their home team, you know. His wife told me she came home one day and somebody was mowing their lawn... they provided meals, they sat all night with him in the hospital... and the thing I... the thing that was different—and then, at the same time, because this is part of the story—another guy who had actually been a leader here at this campus but hadn't really been connected in the last couple of years. They came on Saturday nights, and he lives in [Goddard]—this guy, he and his wife, and their kids are grown—and so he had really kind of been a part of the Goddard campus and really revolutionized their walk with Christ and were connected out there.

He was riding his bike. Freak accident. The guy he was riding with came up on the side of him, and he didn't realize he was right beside him and he... well the other guy didn't realize—Roger was his name—Roger came up beside him—and he didn't realize Roger was there, and he kind of turned. Knocked Roger off into Colbert. He didn't have his helmet on. And he died a couple weeks later. Brain injuries, or, you know, head injuries.

And... both of those people had been active here. And if they had been [at the Westlink Campus] we would have cared for them, but the sense of community... because even if you weren't in Roger's group, there's only 350 people out there [at the Goddard Campus], so if you didn't know Roger, you knew somebody who knew Roger. And you don't have that experience [at the Westlink Campus].

And the great thing about this multi-site thing or about a small... I have been in a large church so much of my life, I've forgotten about that sense of community that you don't get in the big megachurch. And we're sensing that. That's what people like about Café.

And we [at the Café Campus] haven't had an experience quite like that, but it was such a great reminder that there's some real awesome things... there's a reason why 90% of the churches in this country are, you know, a hundred people or less. And I tend to think of that as not

necessarily a good thing, and there's some things about it that aren't very good. But, there are, in a lot of healthy churches, some really good things that happen. And so, that's kind of the care... and so that would be a story.

Let's see... I'm trying to think. The other thing we've seen at both campuses is, we've seen people [at the Westlink Campus] who have been around... because the other thing about a large church is that you get a lot of pew-sitters. They're just not engaged. They're just coming and benefiting—they're consumer Christians. And what we've tried to do at both campuses, we've tried to turn people from consumers to producers. So, the level of engagement.

Most of the people leading and helping that you saw today were not engaged when they were part of [the Westlink] campus. So that's been an awesome, awesome thing.

And there's a tendency... we can't make people grow spiritually. We can't make people come to Christ, that's a God thing that has to happen. All we can do is try and facilitate it. And it's amazing. If you can get people into a group—a face to face group—move them out of the crowd, and you get them into serving, there's a much greater chance they're going to grow in their relationship with God and there will be, you know, God's going to do something cool in their life.

So... those would be a couple of things.

And then we, it's kind of fun, we do baptisms [in the Café Campus] in a horse tank, which is kind of neat. But there's... there's a smallness. There's a family feel that you can't replicate over [at the Westlink Campus]. And one of the biggest problems with the staff is that it... and even people, people think we're growing because there's lots of people [at the Westlink Campus] every week, "people I don't know, so they must be new!" Again, this whole idea that we could be in decline and people wouldn't even know it. Because, it's so easy to think that everything that's going on [at the Westlink Campus] is good—and there are a lot of great things—but, the smaller congregations, I think, give an opportunity for some cool things to happen.

We had a barbeque after church last weekend. We try to not just do that to do it, again the whole idea is "bring your friends, bring your guests, stay for lunch"... we talked about groups, we had a couple testimonies and kind of talked about what it meant to be in a group, and so we try and get people in. It's about... we know it's a win if people come back from the weekend and two if they take next steps. They made a step to receive Christ or they made a step to get in a group or maybe to start serving, you know, and that's what we're constantly pushing.

So, I'm trying to think of more stories...

I mean there have been a number of stories. I remember, oh, a couple that had... there's a couple... oh! One of our guest ministry coordinators has two daughters and they've kind of quit coming to church. One of them is a single mom, the other one is living with her boyfriend—they're not married—and I think there's some kids between them? And then he had some kids from a previous marriage? But they both—both of those girls—have gotten, and their families, and they've gotten engaged here... and so, part of it is I think it's just kind of... it's been an easier thing... "It doesn't feel quite like the church I grew up in." And sometimes that's a plus for people.

It's interesting. Wichita is a city... there's some research that's been done, like the ten middle states in the middle of the country, if you lump them together and you look at cities the size of Wichita. We are in the top three cities in our size group that has the largest percentage of people in a survey who would say they are unaffiliated with any religious group. So... which is kind of interesting to me, if you think about us being the Bible belt. And there are lots of churches here, but there are a lot of people planting churches here from all over the country too. There probably are a dozen new churches trying to get going, you know, in a ten mile—no—in a three to five mile radius from here. It's kind of interesting.

And we try and help those folks, you know, we provide a place for them to meet and, you know, we... I'm sorry, I'm just babbling on here.

No! I'm actually really interested in hearing a little bit more about the church-plants. And so, right now, do you have multiple churches that are meeting here and utilizing your spaces then?

Well, we haven't had any actually meet here for a service. Part of the reason is just—we don't have a place for them. And I think we're a little bit... unless they would meet on a Sunday night or a weeknight, we're a little bit threatening for them because, you know, we've got all these bells and whistles and they're here at the same time... but we... there's a group of them that are planting churches that meet here once a month and we do this, you know, we promoted this thing called the Leadership Summit this weekend and we will try and--and I've said this to our guy that is working, that's connected with this church—we want all those guys to come free. So you just need to find out who they are and if they want to come. They come free. And it's just one of the ways that we can bless them and encourage them. And, you know, it's an investment for the community.

One of the things we do in addition to these backpacks, we'll give every school in our, we call them the Westside Theater Schools of Wichita, and I don't know how many of them there are, and then the Goddard schools and the Maize schools. We'll give every elementary, middle, and high school, I think it's five hundred dollars at the beginning of the year and we say "you don't have to tell us what this is for, but we know you have kids that don't have shoes and they need backpacks. Just use that. Give that to your social worker." You know, that's been a huge—and I said, we don't want our name on it. We're not interested in that. But the good news is people find out, "where did this come from?" And, mainly amongst the staff, you know and that's okay, that's okay, but we're not, you know, that's not why we do it. Again, we want to be a blessing to the community. So how can we figure out ways that we can do that?

But that... the church plant thing is kind of a phenomenon in that... they tend to ... church-planters? It's a tough life. It's, they just go out there... because again, our consumer culture is so, "what are you going to offer me? You got anything for my kids here?" You know, because [the Westlink Campus] kind of feels like Six Flags over Jesus, you know. So it's... it's a tough... but we feel like some people are going to fit in those places and they won't fit here and that's good, you know? It's a win for Jesus! ... if you can say that!

So, but we feel like multi-site is a much better strategy and it's a much better way to help people get started. And—(brief interruption from church maintenance staff)—so, but just trying to figure out how to help those guys.

There's a church down the road, West Evangelical Free Church, and they're using a strategy to start new churches where they bring in a church planter and he interns with them for a year and at the end of the year, I think, I don't think he can take more than ten families because they're truly trying to reach people that are not church-connected. And I think they give him \$50,000 and then they're kind of off on their own.

So they've got a couple that they're working with, they're starting a church. One of the guys already started another church around in Maize. I think the other one is starting over East someplace.

So, and we're trying to figure out our next site, we think needs to be... the multi-site strategy says "the bigger the baby the healthier the baby." So we started Goddard with 200 about 200 adults and 100 kids. Something like that. And they run about 350. It hasn't grown as much as we wanted it to. I think we've been a little bit surprised. Even our consultant has been a little bit surprised. So, it's the nature of our community. This is not a fast growing community. But it's been, it's a very healthy group. It's just, you know...

And we're think maybe when we get a building, that'll be a, you know, most cultures... it's amazing how people tend to "well, we don't really need a building" and well, there's some truth to that, but even in very primitive cultures... when you have a place, people think you're for real. It's kind of amazing. And we've seen that in a lot of... because we do a lot of cross-cultural work around the world.

And we've, I think... there's a church across the street here that's about running about thir—no, maybe fifty people--and they're renting part of their space to another church plant that's been going for ten years and you can only do that so long. And if you don't get some momentum and get moving, you just kind of lag. So, that's again why we think the multi-site—get a critical mass, make it just easier.

Anyway.

Well hey, I have stolen a little more time from you than I told you I would...

Pastor Larry interjects: that's alright! I'm glad to visit, and glad that you were here and got to see a little bit about what we're doing.