

## Centerpoint Community Church 40 Years

This year we celebrate the fortieth year of CCC, telling the story of what God does through a community of believers committed to living by faith. The Scripture tells us not to despise the days of small beginnings. God has done good things in and through our small beginnings. At this benchmark we celebrate the beginnings and set our face toward what lies ahead, that we might be identified with those who said, “We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved (Heb. 10:39).” In our history we have seen our building burn, our leadership change, and our congregation grow. God has been faithful and will remain so as we move forward. After four decades of ministry we believe God is challenging us to engage in new ways with one another, our community, and the world. God declared through the prophet Isaiah,

See, I am doing a new thing!  
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?  
I am making a way in the desert  
and streams in the wasteland. (Isaiah 43:19)

Any time we see God making a way through the desert with streams of living water flowing into the dry wasteland of our lives; that is new! It’s new for us because we are seeing God inspire us with new vision filled initiatives of how these streams can flow through us to our city and beyond. At our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary we were celebrating the launch of Serve The City, the expansion of our pastoral team, and the plans to build more classrooms and a new worship center. As we cross the 40 year mark we look to the future believing God wants us to be a community of disciples living together in our city with gospel intentionality to expand His church. We are committed to establish multiplying missional groups that make disciples, taking the gospel to those who don’t know Christ. We are convinced that such missional groups will form new churches in what is our “Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria” (Acts 1:8.) We believe doors are opening for church planting as near as South Norfolk and as far as Pristina, Kosovo. We stand on what God has done in our first 40 years, and with renewed zeal, step forward into the next 40.

### **Beginnings**

How did it all start? How did God bring us to this point? In the CCC 1986 annual report John Wenzel wrote, “Some glorify the past. ‘Tis distance lends enchantment to the view’ observed Thomas Campbell. Not so the Christian. We choose to glorify the God of our past. Hitherto hath the Lord helped us – and He will bring us safely home.” As a church, we want to remember our past because it reminds of God’s faithfulness and glorifies Him.

It was at one of those early morning staff meetings in 1976 when the Tabernacle Church of Norfolk staff first heard about the idea for a church in Chesapeake. “We need to begin thinking about a church in Chesapeake,” said Gene Garrick, the Senior Pastor at “Tab.” “We have a lot of folks out there and the Triple R Ranch (RRR) staff could benefit from not having to drive in to ‘Tab’ every Sunday. We’re getting crowded again

and need to think about expansion, now that we have two services and the second service is still full.”

Rich Hardison jumped in, “Gene we also need to think about this new area called ‘Greenbrier.’ I understand it will be the largest expansion for Tidewater (now known as Hampton Roads) in the immediate future. I understand they even have plans for a major shopping mall. We need to be in on the beginning of an area like that, because people are more open to change and the gospel when they move into a new area.” The idea for a new church in Chesapeake actually started when Pastors John Dunlap and Gene Garrick shared their vision with the Elders at Tab in 1975. They wrote, “This rapidly growing area lacks a strong community-type church with priorities in discipling, evangelism and world missions.”

Tabernacle Church and the many churches and ministries started through Tab have a history of God’s people stepping out in faith in response to the vision God gives them. John Dunlap (Tab’s Senior Pastor for 30 years) was the perpetual visionary who imagined a Christian camp in the middle of the Dismal swamp. That dream became the Triple R Ranch! Pastor Dunlap not only responded to God’s promptings for the next dream, but he instilled those dreams in others and shared the vision of what God would do through them as they worked together.

In the early years of Tabernacle Church of Norfolk, when God gave Pastor Dunlap a vision for the Norfolk Christian Schools, God brought Gene Garrick to be his partner in organization. Pastor Dunlap had hired Helena Struthers, a faculty member at a southern Christian college, to be on the church staff and teach at Norfolk Christian. In an unexpected “turn of events”, Gene and Helena became engaged but were willing to put their marriage off for a year. Pastor Dunlap and the School Board interviewed Gene and invited him to help with the ministry. Gene served as the school’s Principal and then Superintendent, as well as Pastor Dunlap’s assistant pastor for 25 years. In 1974, something happened that you rarely get to see on a church staff. Gene became the Senior Pastor and Pastor Dunlap served as his assistant and Pastor-At-Large. Pastor Dunlap was now free to visit Tab’s missionaries on the field and dream of other new ministries. That is when the vision for Community Church of Chesapeake (CCC) began to take shape.

The philosophy of passing the baton of senior pastor to the next generation, before the existing pastor has left the church or passed on, helped maintain a continuity of ministry and a healthy church family. David Neff recently wrote an article for Christianity Today illustrating this principle in the development of Rick Warren’s philosophy saying, “In his final year at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Warren mailed a questionnaire to the 100 largest churches in the country, wanting to discover what had made them successful. The churches varied widely in approach, but they had a few things in common, and to Warren the most important common factor was pastoral longevity.” Though churches in America experience members who come and go, a healthy transition and continuity of pastoral leadership is critical to a healthy church. The Hampton Roads Consortium of Churches\* has found that when the senior pastor passes the baton and remains on staff, the congregation remains much more loyal to the purpose and calling of the church with the next generation of leadership.

\* The Hampton Roads Consortium of Churches consists of Tabernacle Church of Norfolk, Virginia Beach Community Chapel, Williamsburg Community Chapel, Peninsula Community Chapel, Centerpoint Community Church (Previously Community Church of Chesapeake,) and James River Community Church.

## **A New Church in Chesapeake**

After hearing the vision God had put on John and Gene's hearts for the communities of Chesapeake, the work began at Tabernacle Church to plant a church. Evelyn Hutchinson, a Christian realtor and long-time member at Tab, volunteered to help locate the right place for the new church. Many places were considered, including a 7-acre farm on Kempsville Road at Shenendoah, but none of them seemed like the right place.

Meanwhile, CCC's new church congregation was being formed at Tab. Beginning on Easter of 1979, the group met during the Sunday school hour to pray. Pastor Dunlap dedicated much of his time as our primary pastor, with Pastor Garrick, Rich Hardison and Ken Brackney preaching as needed. Some families from the Virginia Beach Community Chapel joined in as well. The Hardesty family had been visiting the Chapel in Virginia Beach, and when they heard about the plans to start a church in Chesapeake, they offered their home as a meeting place. Paul and Bobbie Hardesty had committed their lives to Christ a few years before and had just moved to the area. They were hungry for Biblical teaching and a church with a spiritual life and a mind for missions.

On May 20, 1979 the "congregation" began meeting at the Hardesty home in Great Bridge. Pastor Dunlap usually stood in the hallway and preached to those in the living room and den, since they could not all fit into one room. Pastor Dunlap laid the foundation for the new church with a series of messages on "The Nature of the Church." When John Wenzel became Pastor Dunlap's understudy, he followed up with a series of messages on the "Purpose of the Church." There was a sense of God's favor as He turned the idea of a church in Chesapeake into a reality. Paul and Bobbie Hardesty were thrilled to open their home, knowing that they were strategic in the planting of a new church. Moving the furniture every week is not the best way to keep a home looking nice, but God was moving, and they wanted to have a part in seeing God's kingdom built.

Our Church soon outgrew the Hardesty's home with 50+ people coming every Sunday. The administrator of Tidewater Community College (TCC), who was a believer, allowed the Church to hold services on the campus on Cedar Road. Members brought chairs from the Triple R Ranch that first Sunday on August 5, 1979. Each Sunday all the equipment had to be brought in and set up. No musical instruments were available; so Bobbie Hardesty played on an old GI-surplus foot-pumped organ, Pastor Dunlap had found at an antique store. However, a ruling by the state Attorney General prevented the Church from continuing to meet at TCC, because we did not yet own property.

That first summer, Tom and Mabel Kenney also played a large role in getting our Church started. Tom invested a lot of effort in organizing a church-wide visitation plan to the neighborhoods in the area in order to share the Gospel and invite folks to visit CCC. In just two months they had visited over 250 homes. Tom and Mabel also started the first home meetings on Sunday nights, called satellite groups. In an effort to reach families in this suburban area, they put together home Vacation Bible Schools called ACTION clubs to impact kids and families for Christ right in their neighborhoods. Additionally, they helped make plans for the nursery and children's church as more families started attending the Church. They were thrilled to join God in building another part of his church in Chesapeake. Later God called them to establish and pastor one of our sister churches, the Peninsula Community Chapel.

Jesus said He would build His church and the gates of Hell would not prevail against it. The Community Church of Chesapeake was taking off, in spite of the “gates of Hell” and the normal struggles associated with starting a new church. By the end of 1979, CCC had grown to about 80 members. It was an exciting time as our Church experienced many “firsts” in those early years.

In 1979, we called John Wenzel to be our first resident pastor. It was a part-time position, with the rest of John’s time dedicated to a jail ministry in Virginia Beach. Pastor Dunlap preached his last series of sermons at CCC in December of 1979 on the distinctive qualities of a community church such as Tab. He had been troubled by a cough that would not go away, as well as by pain in his rib cage. In March 1980, the doctors discovered cancer. His last visit at CCC was on March 23, 1980. Pastor Dunlap went home to be with the Lord October 1, 1980.

Our Consortium of churches has a long history of missions work around the world. CCC assumed support for its first missionary, Brad Chase, at the end of 1979. Brad, who had helped organize the youth ministry at CCC, left for Japan with TEAM on a short term assignment to teach English as a way to reach the Japanese with the Gospel.

In April of 1980, our Church performed its first baptism. Pastor Wenzel was presented with a “Certificate of Baptism” by Nancy Doumar, the Executive Secretary of Tab that said, “This certifies that Reverend John Wenzel has baptized his first victim without any drownings or other casualties on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of April in the year of our Lord, 1980.” On September 6, 1981 John performed his first wedding, officiating at the wedding of Carol Daniel and David Fortier. The Church also dedicated its first baby, and started three satellite groups that first year.

As our Church grew, so did our need for space. Glen Cameron helped John and Gene find a lot in the newly developed Greenbrier section, and they put down \$1,000 to hold the six-acre lot. Unfortunately, the Greenbrier development hit a slump, as interest rates soared. The congregation returned the deposit on the property in 1981, leaving the Church with no legal standing to use the TCC facility. As our Church prayerfully sought God’s help, the Twiford Funeral Home on South Battlefield Boulevard graciously invited us to have services in their facility beginning Jan 4, 1980. They offered the use of their chapel, free of charge, and would not even allow the Church to pay for utilities or cleaning. One Sunday, Glen Cameron and Wes Daniel cleared the snow from the parking lot for the regular service, and the Funeral Home paid the Church \$100.

The children were meeting for Sunday school in the home of Joe and Pam Mannix, making it especially hard for young families to commit to a “church” with no facilities. The nursery was in the funeral home’s “viewing room.” There were times when they literally had to roll out a casket – cadaver, flowers and all – in order to have services. You can imagine that the Church didn’t grow much during this period, yet the committed few kept the vision of a church in Chesapeake. God had called a special group of believers that would not give up. We even expanded our missionary commitments to support the young Scott Hill family headed for Spain as missionaries.

Interestingly, Pastor Wenzel had pledged to be a missionary to Spain early in life. John had made a commitment to help open the doors of Spain to the gospel and join the few missionaries that had been working there with very limited religious freedom. However, due to family medical problems they had to change their direction and became involved in planting Community Church of Chesapeake. When Pastor Garrick

encouraged the Hills to head for Spain, CCC felt that the Hills were the replacement for the Wenzel family. So our Church pledged \$150 monthly support, even while trying to save enough funds for our own property and building.

### **CCC Finds a Home**

One Sunday, Wes and Eula Daniel were moved during the morning service to spend time in prayer and then to head out in search of land for the Church. They drove around the Great Bridge area and headed in a direction toward the Cutherell Farm which was on St. Luke's Church Road. They passed a nice-looking field of beans with natural drainage which appeared to be about ten acres. Though there was no "For Sale" sign, they found out that the owners were two brothers named Etheridge. That night they called Mr. Etheridge and presented their need for that bean field. He said the land was not for sale and that he had plans for the property in the future. They explained that the land was needed for a church and that it was in the right area, the right size, and the right configuration. They said their church had been praying for a piece of property just like theirs. Mr. Etheridge stated that he was a Christian and admitted that if the Lord wanted the land, he couldn't stand in His way. Although he wasn't interested in selling, he agreed to pray about it and meet with Mr. Garrick, Mr. Dunlap, and Mrs. Hutchinson.

Pastor Dunlap and Pastor Garrick had plenty of experience explaining their vision to reach Tidewater with the Gospel and inviting people to make sacrifices for the Lord. The land was appraised at \$15,000 an acre. They didn't have hopes of being able to pay that much, but they prayed for God to move in the hearts of the Etheridge brothers and their wives.

The Etheridge family must have been sensitive to the Lord, and God must have really worked in their hearts. They decided the Church could have the land for one third of its appraised value, at only \$5,000 an acre, for the ten acres. They understood that it was important for the Church to have money to start the building construction before winter, so they made an incredible offer. The two Etheridge families asked CCC to put down just \$5,000, and they offered to finance it themselves. By the time closing came on July 30, 1981, everyone knew that God had done a miracle through the Etheridge family. On the very day of the closing, a bulldozer began clearing the entrance to the new facility.

Because the City had rezoned the property from farm land to commercial use, there were several complications with building on the land. First, we were required to pay the difference between the land tax for the past 5 years. The City also insisted on an extended roadway back through the property all the way to the Inter-Costal waterway. Additionally, the City couldn't give the Church water and sewage hookups until certain conditions were met, and there seemed to be one obstacle after another. Finally, after adding a second drainage ditch along the side of the road, the city inspectors were satisfied, and we were ready to move.

The foundation was poured the first of August under the experienced supervision of David Troyer (the father of one of CCC's missionaries, Joyce Cain) who unexpectedly dropped in from Maryland for that week. On the next three-day weekend, the building was put up and the roof was put on. This was possible because David Troyer spent the week pre-cutting the lumber for the weekend volunteers, which included a large group from Tab. Only by the power of God working in surrendered hearts could a building of this magnitude be framed, roofed and dried in by volunteers, in one week of their spare

time. From the first day of August when work began on the foundation, until the first meeting in the building three months later, it was an example of “morning by morning new mercies [we] see; All [we] have needed Thy hand hath provided – Great is Thy Faithfulness, Lord unto [us].”

God sent many gifted servants our way to make it possible. Glen Cameron did the general contracting, and he also sponsored a Satellite group in his home each Wednesday. Richard Holland did much of the finishing work and directed the licensed contractors. The Lord even gave us help from people we didn't even know. Higgerson and Buchanan surfaced the original parking lot and then returned the full cost that had been paid. God was at work moving people to do what could not be done on our own. The fellowship did most of the labor as members jumped in with what they had to offer, like cleaning, painting, cooking and everything from “go-for-ing” to giving “at-a-boys.” On November 22, 1981, the first service was held in the completed church building with John Wenzel as full-time pastor. In 1982, CCC wrote and approved its constitution. The Church remained steady and growing over the next few years with men like Glen Cameron, Dave Northup and Harry Brown making the work move more smoothly.

### **A Call to Missions**

In 1981, CCC sponsored ACTION clubs in five different neighborhoods that reached 69 children. We also saw the baptism of two Vietnamese brothers, Trinh and Liem Le, which we had sponsored for refugee relocation to the U.S. From this growing, new assembly of believers \$10,845 was sent to missions. During the next year, 1982, the membership nearly doubled to 135. The youth department was also growing, and there was a Boys Brigade group. The youth group, led by Brad Chase, raised over \$1,000 for Bibles for India.

Our Church continued its support of missionaries as well as local ministries. CCC joined the Association of Church Missions Committees, and we formed a missions committee to oversee their growing involvement with missions work. We also continued to provide summer ACTION Clubs with Ken Merriken and Becky Sporhase providing the missionary emphasis. Other community events included a 10K Chesapeake Walk for Hunger, and a jail visitation ministry.

The interior of the Church was fully finished in 1984, and the property was paid off by the spring of 1985. That same year, the leadership at CCC was already talking about the need for expanding to a larger building to accommodate the 150+ people attending church each Sunday. Some had talked of two services but Pastor Wenzel wrote, “The truth is that we dare not go to two morning worship services because we do not have room for growth in our Sunday school or in our Sunday evening children's programs.”

In the fall of 1984, the Board of Elders invited Jim Hunnewell to serve as part-time Assistant Pastor. While Jim and Cheryl were preparing to go on the mission field, Jim worked alongside Pastor John in leading the Church. In April 1986, CCC commissioned Phil and Jan Troyer (brother to Joyce Cain) and the Hunnewells to the mission field in a joint commissioning service. These two families were the first members being sent out from our congregation, but they would certainly not be the last.

Phil and Jan Troyer were sent out to work with HCJB, the radio call letters for *Heralding Christ Jesus Blessings* radio ministry in Quito Ecuador, which expanded to include hospitals, clinics and other ministries. The Lord used Phil as an auto mechanic

and Jan as secretary while they both were involved in witnessing in their community. Their witnessing eventually led to a church being planted amongst the people of Quito. Later CCC sent a team of workers to build a church building for Phil's church in one of the poorest sections of Quito. Jim and Cheryl Hunnewell were sent out as church planters with TEAM to Vienna, Austria. It was exciting to see the Lord wonderfully supply for all of the needs of these two families as they prepared to go overseas to serve the Lord. This was a major assignment for our little church to send out two couples in one year. With the help of our sister churches of the Consortium and many individuals, they went out with the needed support.

The first decade of our Church saw church members taking missions trips to Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Hungary, Bethel Bible Camp in Columbia SC, as well as hosting the summer ACTION Clubs. In 1985, Pastor Wenzel traveled as a replacement for Pastor Garrick and representative of CCC to view first hand ministries the Church had supported over the years. In the Philippines, John visited Bible schools and saw the scholarship programs the Church had supported to train evangelists and church-planters. He visited Mike and Pat Mower with JAARS in Nasuli, Mindanao and then on to see Bible translators, Craig and Margaret Sutherland at Brooks Point, Palawan. Because CCC had been faithful and sacrificial in giving to missions around the world, we had also seen how God supplied our needs "according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

One passage that many people love to attach to "Thank You" notes is Philippians 4:19. Paul wrote that verse as an acknowledgment of the Philippians' regular financial support for his missionary team sent to Thessalonica. It was to these Philippians, who were faithful in giving to the work of missions beyond their own local outreach, that Paul said, "*And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*" Over the years CCC has averaged a mission's budget of about a fourth to one third of the total annual budget, and God has indeed been faithful to provide for all our local needs and so much more.

### **Growth Continues**

One of the hallmarks of CCC established in those early years was our emphasis on "community life." In 1992, approximately 80% of the membership also was part of the Church's small group fellowships. Although that percentage has fluctuated over the years, the emphasis and importance of small groups has remained consistent. Small groups were vital to our Church's ability to build up and grow the body at CCC.

Within a decade of starting the Church, plans were drawn up in 1988 for an expansion wing. The foundation was poured on November 13, 1990, and Doug Diehl supervised the framing of the new wing starting in October, 1991. More than 50 volunteers joined Doug in erecting the skeleton of the new 10,000 sq. ft. addition. Some of the key "old-timers" with experience in building Tabernacle Church, Norfolk Christian Schools, and RRR were: Harry Brown, Brian Spidell, Eddie Hill, Bob Diehl, John Finney, Bill Miller, Bill Murr, Bob Rouse, George Babbitt, Lyle Trenchard, Joe and Jan Bradbury, and Willard Nichols. Our goal was to be in the building by March of 1993.

Construction continued on a pay-as-you-go basis that was slower than expected. As Pastor Wenzel said, "We have discovered that the pay-as-you-go route can be long and arduous. Nevertheless, there are some important lessons to be learned along the way, not the least of which is trust in the God who, though He may be quick, never hurries." With

the help of a loan from the Dunlap-Garrick Foundation the remaining work was accelerated and was nearly complete by end of 1995.

In writing the Church's annual report for 1993, John Wenzel identified two events that seemed to epitomize the life of CCC in those days:

- April 25. First day of the Life Focus crusade at Norfolk SCOPE. The first four months of the year were invested in countless hours of preparation for this regional evangelistic outreach - concerts of prayer, training workshops, advertising. Many of our people were involved and rejoiced to proclaim Christ in this way.
- July 18. A hot Sunday in mid-summer, yet a day which exposed what we, as a Church are all about. First, we gathered for Biblical instruction and joyful worship, followed by a meal and fellowship. Then a report from our summer missions team to the Dominican Republic. Sixteen teens and adults had invested ten days for strengthening the ministry of Paul and Linda MacMillan in Juan Tomas. Quite a variety of services were rendered: painting, construction, sewing, VBS, village visitation, a basketball clinic, evangelism, teacher-training (for the local Christian school), bookkeeping, and even some art work. Team members gained cross-cultural experience as they ate, slept, worked, and worshipped with Dominicans. After their report, tearful prayers and goodbyes were uttered, as Randy and Debbie Pesich stood to be commissioned for overseas ministry under Wycliffe Bible Translators.

### **A Season of Change**

On November 2, 1993, CCC lost one of its church "fathers" when Pastor Gene Garrick went home to be with the Lord. Pastor Wenzel wrote about Gene's departure, saying, "His gain, but our loss. What a huge void has been left in our hearts and lives. Yet the death of our beloved friend who lived for Christ and labored as one who truly believed that 'we must work the works of God while it is day' has provided us with new motivation to make the most of every opportunity (Ephesians 5:16). We rejoice in the knowledge that we shall someday be reunited."

Then a couple of years later, John Wenzel made the difficult decision to resign as our Senior Pastor. He wrote about his decision in the 1995 annual report explaining, "Family needs intersected with growing church responsibilities at a point where something had to 'give.'" Nearly seventeen years of ministry at CCC ended at midnight on December 31, 1995. Both Pastor Wenzel and the Church were suddenly facing a bend in the road. John went on to work with international students at the University of South Carolina. Our Church began to pray and seek to discern God's man to lead us in the next stage of growth. John wrote, "Pray for faith to follow (without complaining) as we enter this time of transition."

It was a joy to see how God led John Wenzel into an outreach ministry which enabled him and his family to spend time with his elderly mom, before her death in 2001. John served as the Chairman of the Board for Bethel Christian Camp. He even recruited two of our previous worship leaders at CCC to work at Bethel – Jarl Hill, who now serves as director at the camp, and Tom O'Brien who serves as program director.

After John's resignation in the fall of 1995, an invitation was extended to Scott Hill to consider the pastorate at CCC. After the normal correspondence and candidating

procedures, Scott was called to be the pastor, and they left Spain to begin serving in May of 1996. That year in the annual report Pastor Hill wrote of Pastor Wenzel's 17-year ministry, "John had instilled the principles of unity, doctrinal purity and a love for the lost that enabled Community Church of Chesapeake to maintain its historic commitment to missions while seeking to strengthen the home base through edification, evangelism and worship. After his resignation at the close of 1995, the Church continued to function under the leadership of the Elders with a healthy continuity in attendance and participation."

Scott further explained how the Lord brought them to CCC: "My involvement originally began by offering to spend our furlough at Chesapeake, to allow the Wenzel's time for a sabbatical. Our situation in Spain had been changing prior to the time we received word of John's resignation. A call from the Search Committee opened us to the possibility of serving here, and that was the beginning of the process of leaving the mission field. My prayer is that we can do more for missions collectively as a church than Kit and I could have done on the field."

When Scott and Kit arrived, most of the construction on the new addition was complete except for some electrical work, minor carpentry and the city inspections. Wes Daniel volunteered almost every day to work with Scott to finish up the railings and woodwork for those inspections. The City gave its final approval in July 1996. The service began that Sunday in the old facility as normal. After a declaration of God's goodness to lead us through the six year process, we rejoiced in the faithfulness of God and marched into the new sanctuary while Doug Diehl played "When the Saints Go Marching In" on his trumpet.

With the calling of the Hills from the mission field, God was also sending another CCC family – the Grissoms – to be missionaries in the Middle East. Ed and Elizabeth Grissom had achieved the middle-class dream of a nice home and a successful law practice, but God's call was a greater dream with eternal rewards. It was exciting to realize that Ed, who was raised a Southern Baptist, and Elizabeth, who grew up in a Jewish home, were now being sent together to reach Muslims for Christ. (Elizabeth's parents had converted to faith in the Messiah, Jesus and were baptized at CCC.)

By 1997 church attendance was consistently over 200 and we began to discuss two services. In considering Tabernacle Church's decision to have both a "contemporary" service and a "traditional" service, the leadership at CCC began to wrestle with our own direction. We had continued with a traditional service until then, but without anyone serving as a worship leader. David Curfman, who had served in various ministries in the past, volunteered to lead the worship ministry. The Elders had agreed to a change from singing mostly hymns and an occasional praise song to using contemporary songs predominantly, with an occasional hymn. Dave was willing to prepare a worship team that would lead the congregation in a time of worship with a longer set of songs, rather than using hymns interspersed throughout the service. As with all music choices, some were pleased and some were not. Yet, the Elders were in agreement that this was the direction we needed to go to see growth for the future. With this change came a drop in attendance to below 200, and so the need for two services was no longer an issue.

Missions continued to be a special focus under the direction of Kip Bailey. We sent a team to Quito, Ecuador to build a major addition to Phil Troyer's church in an impoverished area of Quito. The team visited and shared the gospel with people who

lived in “cardboard houses.” It opened our eyes to the need of the poor in our world and opened the heart of Ecuadorians to Christ. Our worship leader, Jarl Hill, even had the privilege of praying with a Communist Quechua Indian, who received Christ on the last day of work. The following year, the Church sent Scott and Kit to Cuba to teach at the Worldteam Seminary and lead two Pastor’s seminars.

The next missionaries to be sent out by CCC were the “tent maker” type. That refers to the time Paul was a tent maker to support himself as a missionary in Acts 18. Riz and Anne Crescini had worked with Inter-Varsity in the past, and Anne was given a contract with a Japanese University to teach English and cultural studies. Riz also worked as a school teacher. Since leaving for Japan, they have been working together with a Japanese church to lead students to Christ and lead their disciples into the local church.

After a few years of rebuilding, the face of our Church was becoming younger, and the nursery and children’s ministry were experiencing healthy challenges due to growth. God was bringing in many young couples, and we were becoming more effective at reaching out to the “suburbanites” that make up most of Chesapeake. God once again provided for our needs in giving us Lori Rosie. She and her husband Don had been involved with various churches in the Consortium for many years. As the Children’s Ministry Director, Lori brought the vision and experience needed to make the ministry a more effective part of caring for our families and their children as the membership and needs of our Church changed.

During this time we also saw an increase in the teenagers at CCC. Jason Arrington and Scotty Hill had been leading the teen Sunday school and spending time to disciple and encourage the youth of our Church. After Scotty married and left for the mission field in Bogota, Colombia, we were struggling to get enough volunteers to minister effectively to the youth. In the fall of 1998, we brought Jason Arrington on staff to build an active youth ministry with the High School teens. He involved our youth in fun activities and bible studies that drew in a number of their friends. He continued for four years, during which time he married his wife, Christine.

In 2002, a number of the families with teenagers moved away, and the youth program began to struggle. It was at this time that God brought the Hildebrand family to our Church. They had been attending Tab but lived and worked in Chesapeake. They had decided to join CCC to have more effective outreach with their local neighbors. Jon took on a part-time assignment as the “Family Life Pastor” in November of 2002, shortly after Jason’s departure. Over the years of his youth ministry at Tab and in Texas and North Dakota, Jon had developed the philosophy of training parents to run the ministries involving their children. Jon worked with our parents to understand the needs of the various age groups, set their own goals, and then choose the curriculum. The parents liked this approach and it produced effective ministries from the little ones, on up to the High School.

Jon was a great addition to the CCC staff because of his heart for missions. Before he came to CCC, he was the state-side director for a camp and leadership ministry in Ukraine. One of the Christmas mission projects was to send Pastor Hill along with others to teach at one of their Leadership Seminars in Kiev. Jon also developed a partnership with the Urban Discovery Ministries (UDM) and Buff Bay Baptist Church in Jamaica to help establish a church in the outlying areas around Buff Bay.

## CCC On Fire

June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004:

“Hello, Mr. Hill this is Alarm Central we have a burglar alarm at the Church.”

“Have you called the police?”

“Yes, they’re on the way.”

“Okay. I’ll be right there.”

We often had “false alarms.” Someone would make a mistake turning the alarm off, or a door was left ajar and someone would set it off when they walked in. The fire detectors were sometimes set off by spider webs or an accumulation of dust. Pastor Hill assumed it was just another false alarm after speaking to worship team members that had entered the church that night for rehearsal.

Later that same night...

“Hello, Mr. Hill, This is Alarm Central. We have a trouble signal but we have received a number of troubles in the area due to a power outage. Do you want to check it?”

“No, the worship team is there and I’m sure they’ll check it.”

There’s that phone again, at this hour. This time it was the worship team. “Hey Scott, I think lightning hit the building and the alarm went off but has stopped now.”

“Do you see any damage to the building?”

“No, we’ve checked all around and everything looks okay. We’re having trouble with the sound system, so we’re going home.”

“Okay, just call Alarm Central and let them know.”

Maybe an hour later...

“Pastor Scott, a fire something...something...”

“I know, I’ve talked with the alarm company and they’re having...”

“THE CHURCH IS ON FIRE AND ITS BURNING RIGHT NOW!!!!!!!!!!!!”

“I’ll be right there.”

After a few attempts in the past, we had decided in 2004 to start two services, and the first Sunday was going to be on June 13<sup>th</sup>. However, God had other plans. Lightning struck the building June 10<sup>th</sup> as the worship team was preparing for that first Sunday with two services. Afterward, they checked the building but did not see the small fire smoldering in the attic of the old section of the building. After they left, it burst into flames, and the rest is a painful part of our “history.” Nevertheless, we believed that God was in control, and we remained convinced He wanted us to press on with the vision He had given us.

That night the TV announcer asked David Shamitz and Pastor Jon what the Church would do now. “We’ll continue on as we always have because the church is not brick and mortar but living stones, made up of people. The real church is fine.” Doug Vanderlip described how his co-workers responded to the TV coverage. His secretary commented how one of the young boys (Drew Rosie) had said that God had something big for us and that this would work out for our good. The office was talking about how much faith “the little fella” expressed and how positive all the television interviews had been. Doug said his office was “a buzz” with admiration for the attitude of expecting bigger and better things from God for our church. One photographer took a picture of a book cover in the

Pastor's office that was in the middle of charred ruins with the title clearly visible, ***“What in the World is God Doing?”***

We know that God is building His church, even through the experience of seeing much of our building and all it contained burn. Pastor Hill lost all his books and 34 years of collected and recorded wisdom, yet many in the congregation spoke of a new dynamic in his preaching after the fire. He didn't have power point slides or even sermon notes inserted in the bulletin, but to many, the power of God was more evident than ever.

The fire consumed the original wing of the Church which included the fellowship hall, library, church offices including the Young Life office we allowed them to use, kitchen, foyer, youth group room, and Sunday school classrooms. It was a blessing that the firewall stopped the spread of the fire into the newer wing, sparing the new sanctuary, classrooms and nursery rooms. When the new wing was being built, there had been complaints about the extra expense of putting up the firewall between the two wings, but this was a lesson for the verse “In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1Thess. 5:18).” The news of the fire spread quickly, but reality slowly sank in with how difficult rebuilding was going to be. How often have many members thought about a book, a file, an appliance, or an article of some kind they wanted, only to remember that it was destroyed in the fire?

The Church made plans to meet the following Sunday on the property in a rented tent, so that everyone could come to see and feel what had happened. The very next day after the fire, the director of Greenbrier Christian Academy came to offer not merely condolences but the use of their school for the summer. Many local churches made similar offers, and some sent generous donations for the reconstruction. Apostles Lutheran Church even came that first Sunday to provide refreshments before and after church. God gave a beautiful picture of the Body of Christ, as other brothers and sisters in the Lord reached out to encourage and help. It was a testimony of how God's people are not to be concerned just about their own personal church but rather the whole kingdom of God.

Another amazing thing was how the whole church rallied to offer their hard labor, finances, planning abilities and whatever was needed to get the reconstruction underway. Israel Steinmetz had just been hired as Administrative Assistant, and the Church soon learned what a gift from God he would be. His organizational skills and ability to improvise proved crucial to the task of functioning without a “church office.” He served as the go between for all the different teams that were organized to work with the insurance company and with the contractors that were involved in the clean-up and reconstruction. Each team invested countless hours analyzing and calculating the loss, as well as helping with ideas and plans to rebuild.

In the months following the fire, the Elders spent much time in prayer and discussion in order to discern how the Lord wanted our Church to rebuild what was lost. The Elders sensed the Lord wanted CCC to grow, not shrink, because of the fire. While there was a sense of “loss” at what was burned up, the leaders were in agreement that it was a time to “build” on what God had already done, with a vision for the future. With that in mind, we decided to replace what was lost in the fire with a “Community Life Center” that would provide room for growth and facilities for expanded family ministries – including a larger foyer, a multi-purpose room that could double as a large worship center for several hundred people, a youth center, expanded nursery facilities, and additional classrooms.

Plans were drawn up, funds were raised, and construction was started in 2005. The Church understood it could take several years to complete, but we were committed to trusting the Lord with each decision and step along the way. Determined to use all God had given us, we even converted the slab from the burned down part of the building into a patio and pavilion to give us a place for outdoor activities and fellowship.

### **After the Fire**

As expected, the loss of half of our facilities did not hinder the Church's spiritual growth or passion for its ministries and missions work. The strength of the worship team grew to the point that the Church's passion for God-centered worship became one of our CCC distinctives. A community-wide "MusicFest" and building fund-raiser in 2005 led by our worship team and attended by churches from all over Chesapeake, was a testimony to the gifts and provision God was bestowing on CCC. The youth ministry continued to grow in both size and effectiveness as well, impacting our teens and their families through the parent-run approach adopted a few years earlier. The Church's "family-centric" philosophy also became one of our distinctives. Church retreats became an annual event each fall that ministered to a large part of the body through a weekend of worship, teaching, fellowship activities, and plenty of food. Speakers such as Milt Uecker from Columbia International University, Jeff Gilbert of The Potter's School, Steve Demme, Rich and Kathy Hardison from our own Consortium, and Lew Sterrett from Miracle Mountain Ranch Ministries encouraged and equipped our Church over the years with sound Biblical teaching.

Our Church's involvement with short term missions had recently been "re-ignited", and it continued to grow tremendously in the years since the fire. Our Church sent 13 teams and 4 interns on several short-term missions in the early 20s, including:

- Belgium (2005). A CCC team joined a team from Tab to support an outreach in Brussels called "Serve the City" to work with refugees and those in need around the city.
- Jamaica (2004, 2006 & 2008). A CCC team joined several members from Urban Community Church of Norfolk to support Pastor Vernon Allen & the churches in Buff Bay.
- China (2005 & 2006). On two occasions, the Swinehart family was sent to work with Mike and Joy Lane, missionaries from Tab, in support of their work.
- Peru (2006, 2007). Pastor Hill and a small team from CCC went on two occasions to help re-build a church and lead a pastors' training conference.
- Guatemala (2008). Pastor Hill trained pastors' in various pastor's conference in Guatemala.
- Thailand (2008, 2009). The Church sent a team of teens and adults led by Chris Williams, in conjunction with The Potter's School, to help lead a conference for 400 missionaries and their families from approximately 15 countries across Asia.
- Honduras (2008, 2009). Working again with The Potter's School, Chris Williams led two teams to work in the rural village of San Antonio, helping with construction, bible lessons, and medical wellness checks for the village children.
- Internships. In 2009, CCC commissioned 4 members to work in 4 different internships around the world: Jon Hildebrand II (3 months with Church plant "The Well" in Brussels, Belgium); Bekah Rosie (3 months at a children's home in

Bogota, Columbia); Jessica Williams (3 months at a children's home in Manila, Philippines); and Rachel Paul (9 months working with families at a medical mission in Honduras).

Our Church also grew in its commitment to reach out and minister in the local community. Several members were heavily involved in the Franklin Graham Festival that came to Norfolk in May, 2007. After participating in the training sessions leading up to the festival, the team of teens and adults from CCC served with volunteers from churches all over the Tidewater area. CCC was blessed to be part of an event that drew over 30,000 people in three days and witnessed hundreds of people committing their lives to Jesus Christ.

Chris Williams had been helping Pastor Hildebrand with the youth ministry since 2003, eventually leading the parent team overseeing this part of the Family Ministry. He was called to serve as an elder on our leadership team in 2004, and then God led us into a new transition. We sensed God calling Jon to minister more in outreach and missions, while Chris felt a strong call to retire from the Navy and become involved in full-time family ministry. It was a great fit. In 2007, Jon became Pastor of Outreach and Missions, while Chris took over the position of Pastor of Family Ministries, and together they increased our capacity for both family ministry and missions work, with each reinforcing the other. The Church's leadership also re-focused the purpose of our new building as a *Community Life Center*, to be used not only for ministry to the church family but also for outreach to the community.

In January 2008, as the Elders were seeking God's leading for the coming year at their annual retreat, they became convinced that God wanted the Church to strengthen its outreach in the community of Chesapeake. Jon Hildebrand and Chris Williams had desired to organize a "Serve the City" effort in Chesapeake for several years, but it wasn't until 2008 that the Lord opened the door. Through some amazing God-ordained partnerships that developed between several Chesapeake churches, the Police Department, and some of the neighborhood Civic Leagues, CCC helped organize and lead several community projects around Chesapeake. They included home repairs, neighborhood clean-up's, visitation, and a variety of children's programs for some of the most needy homes and neighborhoods in the area. During a week in June, 2008, over 100 volunteers from CCC were part of one of those teams working in Crestwood Manor, providing over 2,000 man-hours to work in 34 homes. In 2009, CCC helped expand the effort to approximately 20 churches in 5 communities as more churches got involved in "adopting" a neighborhood. Our Church's volunteers again worked in Crestwood, this time sending visitation teams and completing work on 74 different homes during the week-long event. These *Serve the City* experiences had a profound impact on the vision and life of the congregation at CCC. In addition to helping some very needy people in the area while sharing our faith, our Church was part of a movement that crossed cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic lines in a way that exemplified the unity of the Body.

In 2008, our Church sensed that it was time to take another venture of faith. Dan Hardesty was doing more and more with our worship ministry, while trying to make time to work on our website and publications. He also had a gift for creative design and the appearance of the Church facilities. The Elders decided to approach Triple R Ranch, where Dan headed up their Venture Out program, to discuss sharing Dan with the Ranch

and the Church. As Dan became our Pastor of Worship and Arts, it was clear that God had brought together an amazing team. Our pastors Jon, Chris, and Dan were willing to combine their service to the Church with outside ministries to form a top-quality team that the Church could not afford if it had to pay them full time. With the growth of the pastoral staff and several of our ministries in the years after the fire, it was evident that God was doing something new that was indeed making “a way in the desert.”

### **The Last Ten Years**

Having our staff crammed into a construction trailer, with thin walls, a leaky roof, and a bathroom that emptied into a holding tank on the parking lot felt like a wandering in the wilderness. Though it was to serve as a temporary office space while the new building was completed, the staff ended up serving in its confines for many years. The time had finally come to be delivered and a new way was made. In the fall of 2010, the first phase of what was called the Community Life Center, was completed. This meant new classrooms and a nursery wing were available for use, and the old classrooms could be converted to offices. The staff made an exodus from the trailer and occupied new office space in the old nursery hall. However, the staff weren't the only ones to move in.

Children filled the new classrooms on Sunday mornings, and it became apparent that ministry to these young ones would require more than a volunteer. Lori Rosie was brought on staff and she invested even more energy into developing and running the Children's Ministry at CCC. Our new Reign Forest complete with jungle themed rooms, and our upstairs Kid's Quest classrooms became the center for discipling the next generation.

We knew this large new facility was not just to be used for ministry on Sundays and were eager to make it available for whatever God had in mind. A local education ministry called KEYS (Kingdom Education for Young Scholars) reached out to us in need of space. Since KEYS exists to partner with home schooling families to impact the world for eternity with the Christian worldview through excellence in arts and academics, we felt very aligned and agreed to host them. After a brief delay in finishing up construction of the new building and getting occupancy permits, KEYS moved in during the fall of 2010. Hundreds of students and teachers were soon swarming the halls. The sound of band, choir, and drama practice filled the air. Several families who had enrolled their children began attending CCC along with the director, Kathy Totheroh.

Though the city of Chesapeake gave us a partial occupancy to utilize the first phase of the new building in 2010, the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase which was the multi-purpose room / worship center did not open until three years later. On September 22, 2013 we worshiped together in our new space. There was a sense of enthusiasm and eagerness to see God bring more people into our faith community. As the church grew in number, so did the ministry needs. In order to facilitate ministry to a growing congregation, the decision was made to bring Chris Williams on full time as an associate pastor over family ministries.

In 2014 we were hosting a Boy Scout troop that was wrestling with whether to continue with the organization, when several within the group decided to start a Trail Life chapter. As our family ministries were being more and more emphasized, it seemed a beneficial step to adopt Trail Life as a ministry of the church. The troop has grown from a handful of trailmen to close to 100 over the years since it formed. Under the leadership

of men like Pete Dowdy young men of CCC and other churches gain understanding of Biblical values and beliefs through Godly male role models through outdoor themed activity. For similar reasons, in 2016 CCC also welcomed an American Heritage Girls troop, a counterpart to Trail Life that seeks to build women of integrity through service to God, as part of our ministry to families.

The church was healthy, the new building completed and occupied, a robust staff was in place to effectively oversee the various ministries, and all was stable. Pastor Scott and his wife Kit were gifted at building community and demonstrating sincere care for others. CCC had benefited from their consistent, sacrificial, nurture and humble leadership for 19 years. It was at this time that Scott received a call from Florida saying, "We need a pastor like you to come help us through a difficult time." The church where Scott had come to Christ and been discipled, Venice Bible Church, was in need of a pastor. The particular need was a pastor who could guide them through a hard transition and provide a humble healing hand. Though the elders and congregation at CCC knew there would be an eventual passing of the baton, this turn of events made it a close and measurable reality. But, to whom should the baton pass?

Chris Williams and Dan Hardesty had both demonstrated a deep investment in the life of the church, carrying much responsibility, manifesting pastoral gifts, and providing key leadership. Pastor Scott made the proposal that CCC adopt a non-traditional approach to senior leadership and move forward with a co-pastorate. This approach would partner Chris and Dan together as lead pastors taking advantage of their combined gifting. Chris would oversee education and leadership development, also lending his executive oversight skills. Dan would take on the preaching ministry while providing continued direction in the area of worship. The idea was presented to the congregation with plenty of time for questions to be answered and preparations to be made. The membership voted Chris and Dan in as co-lead pastors with overwhelming affirmation on July 12, 2015. That August the CCC family waved farewell to the Hills and embarked on a new journey with two new captains at the helm.

With Chris and Dan taking on more pastoral responsibilities, the weekly tasks involved in leading family and worship ministries needed to be lifted from their shoulders. More leadership was needed, and this gave the opportunity to empower others to step into vital roles. Johnny Peebles stepped up to be the worship leader, organizing and preparing the music teams, while Danny Bowden scheduled and trained the sound and media teams. Doug and Sharon Persons were eventually recruited to oversee the parent-led youth ministry and served faithfully for several years, followed by Richard and Melinda Ryan (In 2019 The church made the move to employ two part-time youth ministry assistants – Jay Benfante and Hannah Walker.) In addition, other areas of ministry gained leadership including the Women's Ministry under Teresa Clark, and the newly established Mercy Ministry under Steve and Vicki VanBecelaere.

For the next several years the church grew in number and in spirit. By 2018 there were around 600 adults and children on the regular attenders list. A growing church required a growing staff. Ron Sawade, a retired pastor, brought with him over 20 years of church ministry experience as he relieved our need for help with administration and facilities. Emily Cameron brought additional administrative and organizational skills when she joined the office staff. As of 2019, Ron and Emily still serve along with Jennifer Dudley our office assistant, and Madeleine Haggard who oversees our data base

and visitor assimilation. This team along with Bookkeeper Larry Cutherell keep the ministry ship afloat providing the structural support to the ongoing work of enabling our church family to experience communion with God, community with one another, and to be on commission to reach the world for Christ.

A larger church also requires a strategic approach to discipling more people. Seeing the value of creating strong one-on-one mentoring while also guiding the body through a core set of foundational truths, several of the elders were tasked with developing a discipleship plan. What emerged was Edify. This one year, 26 session plan, partners two people together on a journey through several books discovering and discussing our identity in Christ, God's over-arching plan in the Bible, the vitality and unity of the church, and eternal perspective. In the first year 17 pairs of Edify partners went through the plan.

In order to move people beyond basic spiritual foundations with Edify and offer a plan to help prepare leaders for service within the church, a second plan was established. Equip is a one year walk through several books that teach what it means to be a servant leader, walk side-by-side in ministry, and understand God's design for oversight and practice within the church. Along with these two discipleship and preparation plans, an Eldership formation plan was established for any man selected for consideration as an elder. Edify, Equip, and Eldership were keys to establishing a well-planned approach to continually providing mature leadership for a growing church.

Missions has remained a core distinctive of CCC. The last ten years took our congregation to places around the globe to support missionaries on the field and to serve distant communities.

- Honduras (2010-17). A CCC team partnering with The Potter's School and led by Pastor Chris Williams continued to minister to the village of San Antonio through community development projects, children's programs, bible studies, and leadership development.
- Thailand (2010-19). Our church continued to send teams to support the missionary conference where Lori Rosie began to take on a key role in the organization and execution of the children's program.
- Paraguay (2013). To encourage and work alongside our missionaries Jamie and Char Hunt, a group from CCC ventured into remote areas in the Chaco.
- Czechia (2014-19). Howie and Sherri Davis led multiple small groups to help with English Camps, and in 2019 moved to Prague as teachers.
- Kosovo (2018,19). To help establish Serve The City in Pristina, Kosovo, Pastor Jon Hildebrand led a team to serve in 2018. Pastor Chris Williams returned with a team in 2019 led by Chali and Emily Cameron in hopes of furthering STC's permanency there as a tool in the hands of church planters.
- In 2019, CCC also sent out three young women around the globe: Katie MacDonald to serve as a teacher in the Dominican Republic for two years, Carolina Shipp to serve in Ukraine with Bethany Gateways for 18 months, and Rachel Smyder with YWAM for training and a yet to be determined destination. We're excited to see the next generation of future missionaries serving where the Lord is leading them.

In 2019 Community Church of Chesapeake changed its name. Wanting to maintain the Community Church distinctive but seeking a name that would not be limited to one city, the name Centerpoint Community Church was adopted. The new name provided a more significant meaning and gave a talking point to our name. We have always seen Jesus as the center point of all we do. He is who we move toward and seek to know. From the center point of our city we move out to people and places where he is not known. Centerpoint paired perfectly well with our vision, “To know Him, and to make Him known.” We were the same church, with the same vision, values, purposes, and partnerships, but with a new name.

Since its initial days in the late 70s, CCC has maintained a cooperative relationship with the Hampton Roads Consortium of Churches. The Consortium is a group of aligned sister churches united in the focus of being broadly evangelical, committed to global missions, and sharing a connected history stemming from the original ministry of Tabernacle Church of Norfolk. We look to our sister churches for needed counsel and share ministry initiatives on occasion such as conferences, seminars, retreats, and fellowship events. We have also all signed a covenant affirming our commitment and accountability to one another. In recent years the Consortium’s bond has strengthened with a renewed zeal for living out together the great commandments of loving God and our neighbor and fulfilling the great commission to spread the gospel near and far. The current senior/lead pastors of our sister Consortium churches are:

Tabernacle Church of Norfolk-	Ed Haywood (New pastor in 2020)
Virginia Beach Community Chapel-	Robb Esperat
Williamsburg Community Chapel-	Travis Simone
Peninsula Community Chapel-	Tom Kenny (Garret Spitz in 2020)
James River Community Church-	Ben LoPresti

### Looking Ahead

What is more exciting? Getting in on the ground floor to start a church in 1979 or being a part of it 40 years later as we embrace being united on mission to see God multiply His church? The same thrill of opening your home, the way the Hardestys did, seeing people encounter Christ in their den and living room, should be our reality today. The words spoken in that interview, following the fire, of how God is building the Church with believers and not bricks are the words that we commit to live out daily. The core values of CCC – biblical teaching, community life, and missions – have not changed in our forty years, but God is leading us to pursue our purposes and vision in new and exciting ways. We move forward under a new name, with renewed vision and several new strategic initiatives. We still place a strong emphasis on worshiping and celebrating God with musical excellence, Christ-centered lyrics, in a style that avoids showmanship. We have established a distinctively family-centered approach to our ministries because we want to strengthen and equip our families especially in their responsibilities to raise up the next generation to follow and serve the Lord. We have strengthened our commitment to invest sacrificially in missions work at home and abroad. We have chosen to invest significant funds and labor in our community through *Serve the City* so that God will be exalted as people come to Christ here in Chesapeake. Life and the building of God’s church is a series of choices, and as Joshua told Israel at the end of his life,

“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

God has brought together a very special congregation of believers that want to see the glory of God in our corporate life. We are seeking not just to remember the past, but to discover how God wants to use us in the future. God has invited us to be a part of something very special in the years ahead. We believe God is writing a new story that will bring streams of living water to the wasteland of people living without God and His plan for their lives.

In our fortieth year as a church, we can see how the Lord has provided the experiences and the people to carry out the vision He has given us. We are excited about the new initiatives God has place on our hearts. It is our desire to see the development of Missional Family Groups that are committed to living life together on mission, devoted to praying for and engaging with our city, faithful to care for those in need, sharing the gospel of Christ. Elder, Toby DeBause, has modeled this for us with a targeted Missional Family Group that focused on ministry within the Crisis Pregnancy Center and now has become an organic group growing beyond its original ministry focus. Our plan is to nurture such Missional Family Groups within our communities starting in South Norfolk with the goal of seeing a church plant emerge there. Mike Ramer has emerged as a key leader, and we are currently investing in him for the work in South Norfolk. We are also moving forward to build partnerships in Pristina, Kosovo as we establish Serve The City in that city as a tool to aid those working to plant churches.

We are honored to be a part of the “new thing” that God is doing, and it will be a privilege to work and watch God build His church. Jesus made a promise in Matthew 16:16-18. There we read that, “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus replied, ‘You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.” We’re building on the Rock of Jesus, the Messiah and only Savior. What a joy to be a part of God’s eternal plan!

Our small piece of God’s kingdom in Coastal Virginia is a reminder of God’s faithfulness through the years. We are ready to see God pour out “His streams in the wasteland,” to bring the Gospel to our communities, and to share in sending the Gospel to the ends of the earth. As we focus on communion, keeping our eyes on the glory of God, and look to one another in community, seeking to love and build up one another, we will see the fulfillment of our commission as his kingdom expands across the globe. And that’s how we fulfill our motto “To Know Him and Make Him Known.”

As we prepare for our next 40 years, we expect great things from a great God. How will our ministries inside and outside the Church grow over the years to come? The big question that each of us will have to answer is, “What part will I play in the next chapter of what God is doing at Centerpoint Community Church?”