

WILDWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH & THE MISSIONAL VISION

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A MAJOR PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

Wildwood Presbyterian Church, a member of the Presbyterian Church in America, (hereafter cited as Wildwood) is at a crossroads in her history. With the acquisition of a large parcel of land, the church is at a decision point of planning for the future. Does she build bigger? The same? Multi-site? Sell the property? Church plant? What does the church of tomorrow look like? What is Wildwood's mission? What influence does the surrounding community have on the planning process? These questions, and others, play into the future decisions that Wildwood must make concerning this property and relocation issues. This paper looks at the concepts of the missional debate and how that debate impacts the decisions by the leadership of Wildwood.

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CHAPTER 1

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MISSIONAL THINKING

Before we begin to answer the question of what it means for Wildwood to be missional, we must first define the concept of *missional*. This is not an easy task, because the word is used by a variety of ministries so that the concept itself takes on different shadings.¹ Let's begin by a brief look at the history of the term and draw out a common definition which will be applied to the context of Wildwood.

The term missional traces its origin back to the early 1900's with the councilor movements. Debate developed within the church on the relationship of the 'church and mission', and took place mostly in the context of the International Missionary Council (IMC) meetings. These meetings took place from 1920 – 1958, but the most important ones to the missional debate occurred at Tambaram (1938) and Willingen (1952). At Tambaram the emphasis became 'the church and mission are one.' This emphasis had the implication that the church is the sender and therefore the carrier of the message of the gospel. The church was the hope of the world because if the church would truly act as the church the world would become a much different place –for good. There was also a growing awareness that there needed to be indigenous expressions of

¹ For a fuller explanation of the history of the missional movement, see Ed Stetzer. "The Meanings of Missional" (online articles), 5 parts. available from <http://blogs.lifeway.com/blog/edstetzer/the-meanings-of-missional.html>. or the blog <http://www.friendofmissional.org/>. Internet; accessed Nov 2008.

the church around the globe, if this change were to truly occur. The church therefore was central for the mission of the church; the church and mission were one.² The next significant contribution to the debate occurs at the IMC at Willingen in 1952. It is significant to note the time period – it was shortly after the end of World War II and there was an underlining sentiment that the church had failed upon reflection of the actions, or inactions, of the church in Germany. What began to emerge at Willingen was linking of mission to the theology of the Trinity. The implication of this linkage was that now mission activity was related to the sending nature of God, and therefore mission was bigger than the church. The concept known as the *missio dei* was born. This was a huge shift in the role of the church in missions, no longer central to missions, but rather a part of the mission process which was the bigger Kingdom of God.³ The church now was seeking to find what God was doing in the world and following after Him. In the 1960's the IMC was absorbed into the World Council of Churches and there in the 1960's and 1970's the concept of missions was built upon the foundation of the *missio dei* to focus on the aspects of the social gospel, or to put it another way, carrying out the mission of the *shalom* of the Kingdom. The weakness in this understanding was that the concept of mission lost the reconciliational (i.e.: salvation by justification by faith in Christ) aspect in favor of a *shalom* of focusing on the poor and needy exclusively.

² Stetzer, “The Meanings of Missional”

³ Seung Hyun Chung, “The Origin of the Missio Dei and Its Implication to Missional Ecclesiology: The Critical Reflection of Willigenem IMC (1952)” available from <http://www.earticle.net/FileArticle/200710/633287541244687500.pdf>; Internet; accessed Dec 2008

Why does this history matter? It was against this background that thinkers of the 1980s and 1990s such as Francis Dubose who wrote *God Who Sends* (1983), Charles Van Engen who wrote *God's Missionary People* (1991), and Darrell Guber who wrote *The Missional Church* (1998) began searching for another term to describe the missionary activity of the church. They began to coin the word *missional* to distinguish their concepts from the history and abuses of missions. However, even these thinkers do not agree completely on the meaning of the term. But the introduction of the term gives us an opportunity to distance ourselves from some of pendulum swings found in the missions debate which lead to losing focus on the meaning of the gospel.

What do we learn from the debate history of missions? First, the Kingdom of God is bigger than the church. The church has the opportunity, and mandate, to cooperate with the Triune God in advancing the Kingdom in *all* spheres of life. When the church becomes a 'holy huddle' it ceases to proclaim the gospel in the world advancing the Kingdom, and it in a real sense is no longer the church. Second, any mission activity of the church must be accompanied with the gospel message. The 'cup of cold water' must be given in *His* name. To fail to link the social actions of the church – no matter how benevolent - with the gospel, we will fall into the trap of social justice, and again cease to advance the Kingdom. Third, the church must be indigenous in its cultural context. The implication of this lesson is that to be missional will look different in every context! It may mean a building in one place, and no building in another. It may utilize small groups in one community, but not in another. The church must exegete its culture to advance the gospel in relative ways, without compromising the reconciliatory message of the gospel.

So, what is the meaning of missional? Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City refers to a missional church as having the following elements⁴:

1. Discourse in the vernacular.
2. Enter and re-tell the *culture's* stories with the gospel.
3. Theologically train lay people for *public* life and vocation.
4. Create Christian community which is counter-cultural and counter-intuitive.
5. Practice Christian unity as much as possible with the local level.

How is this played out? Ed Stetzer, professor, pastor, and researcher, states that a missional church becomes missional when it remains faithful to the gospel and simultaneously seeks to contextualize the gospel so the gospel engages the worldview of its hearers.⁵ With this definition we can understand that the primary directive of the church is the spreading of the gospel of reconciliation, but also understand the need to become an indigenous church which relates with its culture in tangible ways which demonstrate the values of the Kingdom.

⁴ Tim Keller, "The Missional Church"; available from <http://www.redeemer2.com/resources/papers/missional.pdf>; Internet; accessed Nov 2008.

⁵ Stetzer, "The Meanings of Missional"

CHAPTER 2

SELECTED HISTORY OF WILDWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

RELATING TO MISSIONAL CONCEPT

Part of the process of determining the missional call of a particular church is understanding its unique DNA.⁶ This DNA is found in part by looking at the history of the church. The following points of history are pertinent to the missional discussion and were developed from a group of fifty people assembled in May 2006 to begin a vision casting process for Wildwood; part of that process was graphically developing the history of the church. (Appendix 2)⁷

The church began in 1976 with two-to-three core families and approximately sixty people who formed a new church in ‘order to be more properly reformed.’ They began meeting in local home but quickly moved to the local VFW building, a funeral home, and then a local elementary school. This pattern of moving locations will be seen throughout the history of the church and appears to be accepted as a natural occurrence in the life of the church, unlike some congregations which become

⁶ Based on the work of Dr. Phil Douglas in his book, *What is Your Church’s Personality?*, and on the web at: <http://douglassandassociates.com/CPblog/>; internet; access Dec 2008.

⁷ Graphic Planning Chart provided by The Grove Consultants International. Available from <http://www.grove.com/site/index.html>; Internet; accessed Dec 2008.

very identified with their building. The congregation called their first pastor, Dr. Nigel Lee, who was much credentialed and had promised to help the church with their vision. His tenure was short-lived; the reason being given was the lack of people skills, although the sermons and teachings were considered very sound.

The next phase involved calling Stephen Bradford in 1980. The church continued to see numerical growth and the vision shifted to spiritual growth of the members. Again the church moved to a new facility on Meridian Road and this was a general period of growth and peace in the church. In the mid 1980s Stephen Bradford moved on and the church was left without a pastor. The church attendance dropped to around 40 and there was consideration of closing the church.

In 1986 a new pastor was called, Mike Khandjian, who was described as a high energy person who 'preached with passion.' One member remarked that Mike's tag line was that 'the Kingdom is fun.' Mike helped create an atmosphere of excitement and celebration in the life of the church and the congregation began to grow again in attendance to about 450. It was during this period that more structure was added to the leadership and the organization of the church began to develop. The church life became family driven and again a move to another facility – the Waccamaw Center. It was during this time an assistant pastor was called, Bob Evans (MDiv, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1979), in 1991. Bob had come out of an Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Tallahassee because he wanted to be involved in a church that was relevant to the culture around them.

In 1996 Bob Evans became the Senior Pastor as Mike accepted another call. The church experienced numerical growth and moved again to the current facility on

Ox Bottom Road. The church staff grew and programs were developed to meet the growing needs of the church – especially in the area of student and children’s ministry. The church continued to develop the reputation in the community where all were welcomed, based on Bob’s vision to be relevant to the surrounding community. His tag line is that he ‘wants to minister to people where they are, not where he wishes they were.’ This vision is permeating the ministries of the church. In 2003 the church had the opportunity to purchase approximately sixty acres two miles north of the current location. Bob kept putting forth the question, ‘How can this new property be used to reach the community?’ There was a real sense not simply to build a *bigger* church this time, but to be strategic in what was built. A plan and capital campaign was initiated and the church was on its way again. However, a one million dollar pledge was suddenly withdrawn which left the church short of the needed financial resources to continue the project, and it was put on hold, however necessary background work continued such as permitting.

The church leadership is now in the process of trying to decide what to do with the land. In God’s timing the missional debate has come to the forefront of the church’s decision making process. Wildwood is asking itself – with the urging of Bob, ‘What does it mean to be missional in our context with the property?’ As elders have read different missional writers the suggestions have been from one extreme to the other – much like the history of the missions debate itself.

What is the next chapter in the history of Wildwood? This question is being asked by the leadership, but also by Bob Evans the Senior Pastor. He has a real

sense of wanting to ‘tee-up’ the church for the next phase of leadership⁸, without wanting to saddle them with debt or a facility that is no longer a useful tool for ministry.

What are the lessons learned from the history of Wildwood’s DNA that applies to the missional question? First, there is a willingness to move for the sake of the gospel. Throughout its history the church has been a bit nomadic, and therefore the idea of a move is not met with much resistance. (The resistance to the move, in the author’s opinion, is wrapped up in the understanding, or misunderstanding, of what is a missional church. Can it be done without a building? Should it be done without a building?)

Second, the history of the church showed an outreach orientation, most of which was developed from the ground up. Third, the church has a ‘grass roots’ mentality due in part to five pastors in its thirty-two year history. Bob Evans has had the longest tenure of twelve years and his leadership style encourages members to use their gifts for the furtherance of the Kingdom, and the church is here to assist in that effort. These factors of Wildwood’s DNA will come into play as the community needs are assessed and missional initiatives are formulated.

⁸ Again in the providence of God’s timing the leadership of Wildwood is entering the legacy phase of ministry, which in the author’s opinion puts Wildwood in a more reflective and better decision making place. See Appendix 3.

CHAPTER 3

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

How do we exegete the community we live in? What is the community?

These and several related questions need to be asked as we tackle this question. Ed

Stetzer suggests the following (non-exhaustive) list of questions as a starting point:⁹

1. Determine what, if any, natural borders exist for the community or define the community in which the church will minister.
2. Contact experts from the community – members of school administration, police department, government officials, business owners, and the like to gain insight into the community needs, strengths and weaknesses.
3. Review census data. What are the trends in the community? Age breakdowns? Family units? Economic levels?
4. Contact news organizations to determine the major events in the recent past.
5. Connect with indigenous churches to determine what partnerships are possible.

What is the community? Two major subdivisions border the current church property – Summer Brooke and Ox Bottom Manor. These subdivisions are valued because of their location and the excellently rated elementary school (Hawks Rise) in between them (Appendix 1) and zoning for the newest public high school in the area (Chiles). As one elder of the church has noted, “If you were to take a helicopter up from the church parking lot, you would see lots of houses with fences and swing sets.” This area is considered a family friendly area.

⁹ Ed Stetzer. Class Lectures notes by author, Trinity International University, ME 8000 Becoming a Missional Church, Deerfield, IL, Nov 2008

What do the experts say about the area? We spoke with the Principal of Hawks Rise Elementary School asking her about the needs of her school and the community. Her number one issue is space. With the growth of the community she is having to add portable classrooms to accommodate the numbers, which in turn takes away recreational fields. The numbers are also causing her to give up voluntary programs such as the Florida Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) program in order to use those classrooms for mandatory programs. The facility is also locked up after hours and on the weekends so the community does not have access to what playgrounds are left. The Principal also mentioned that the aftercare programs were crowded and any relief we could offer in that area would be helpful. (Several other large churches in the community offer aftercare programs.) Although she is required to have special need opportunities she mentioned that this was a growing need, especially since some of the private schools had waiting lists. Another aspect of this community is the city recreation department. When we spoke with this group there was a need for athletic fields for the growing sports programs and playgrounds areas for this side of town. There was also plans for a bike trail following Meridian Road and they expressed an interest in gaining permission for the trail to go through our property since it is so natural on the proposed route. In the zoning process the city officials have been involved and there the project was met with mixed reviews. Some favored the project seeing a source of revenue for street improvements that would be paid by the church instead of from the city's resources; others saw the project as damaging to the environment and strongly opposed it. Leaders from the Fellowship of Christian Athletes then approached church leadership after hearing of the plans for the property and indicated that they were finding it harder to

locate facilities in which they could run the summer camps and programs. Such a facility would help their ministry as well. Finally we spoke to representatives from the Senior Center located in downtown Tallahassee, and they expressed an interest in having a satellite center in this section of town.

What does the census data reveal about the community?¹⁰ Using the zip code of 32312 which includes the two target subdivisions, the census data showed what was suspected from observation. (Appendix 4) In broad terms the area is a white upper-middle socio/economic class of families with young children. There is also a significant portion of older adults in the area that are reaching retirement age, and some pockets of minority housing.

What major events have happened in the community? Most of the people spoken to did not recall major events, but rather spoke of the ‘recession proof’ aspect of Tallahassee. The major industries in Tallahassee are education and state government.

What are indigenous churches doing in the area? Because Wildwood is off the beaten path we are the only major church in the area. There are several smaller churches along Meridian Road and attempts need to be made to reach out to them. There are also several larger churches in Northeast Tallahassee which are attempting to do more things together on the children, student and adult levels. Some churches have recreational leagues and have mentioned that they have run out of room to grow those programs any bigger, and their aftercare programs are full. More research needs to be done in this area.

What are the major needs apparent in the community assessment? Recreational space seems to be a major need in the community, space for community

¹⁰ Demographic data obtain from <http://www.ZIPskinny.com>; Internet; accessed Dec 2008.

activities, as well as educational programs to take the pressure off the school district.

These needs would seem to be consistent with needs of a growing suburban community.

CHAPTER 4

MISSIONAL PLANS FOR WILDWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Several missional ministries have already begun at Wildwood based on the community assessment and gifts of the congregational members. *Our Father's Storehouse* was begun to meet the needs of people in the area who needed supplemental groceries and general supplies. This program meets every Tuesday afternoon and serves approximately eighty families a week. This year the church began a VPK program that can hold a maximum of eighteen children in the current facility, and currently has enrolled sixteen from the surrounding community.

Where do we go from here? The question facing Wildwood is what to do with the new property? Can a building be missional? In the blog *Out of Ur*, the question was asked by David Finch¹¹:

Is buying a building always contra being missional? Upon first instinct, the answer would be yes. Certainly missional gatherings would hesitate to invest in a traditional church building. But are there times when inhabiting a building might itself be incarnational according to missional logic?

But if truth is to be embodied, if we are not going to be limited to only words, then we must embody ourselves as a physical presence in the community. This might include inhabiting a building.

¹¹ David Finch, "Missional Bricks and Mortar" available from http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2006/12/missional_brick.html ; Internet; accessed Dec 2008.

It would appear that from the community assessment, the DNA of Wildwood, and the vision casting of the leadership that it would lend itself to building on the property. But build what?

For the sake of full disclosure the author's background is mainly in Children's Ministry and it is through that lens that issues are often seen. So as the data is analyzed there seems to be a growing picture of a Wildwood Community Center type of facility. First, this facility would include a recreational space. This space would have athletic fields, a playground with shade and restroom facilities, and a full gym with classrooms and offices. Second, the facility would include educational space. This space would be used for an expanded VPK program, and a special needs VPK which would work in a new facility which would be built to ADA codes. Third, expanded OFS space. This ministry seems to be increasing its service with the recent economic downturn, but also could expand the services offered such as job training. Fourth, the creation of a retirement center or assisted care facility. The demographic study showed a growing population nearing the retirement age, and this area of Tallahassee does not have such a facility. Lastly, in time with available resources the rest of the church could move its ministries to the new property.

These are simply dreams; however they do represent an incarnational use of a building so that a church can be missional in its context. As Bob likes to ask, "If Wildwood ceases to exist would anybody really notice?" These plans would allow Wildwood to become an indigenous part of the community.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

It is admitted by most that the transition to a missional church is difficult, especially for an established church. As Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk point out in their book *The Missional Leader*¹²,

Despite the claim that congregations are so hopelessly compromised they cannot make the adjustments required to missionally engage our new context, a congregation can become the center of a missional life.

Can Wildwood become missional without relocating? Yes, but that would require a thoughtful strategy to cope with the space limitations that are currently faced and develop a plan for use of the monies that would come from the sale of the property. Can Wildwood become missional by relocating? Again, the answer is yes, and in the opinion of the author, would more seriously meet the needs of the community in an incarnational manner. But it will only be incarnational if the membership of Wildwood is trained, as Keller points out, to live out their Christianity. It is not enough to simply build the Community Center, but rather will our people engage those people on the campus building relationships with them to the point of sharing the gospel? Will they engage the people who would come to a playground? Gym? Pre-school? Ball fields? If they do not then we have fallen in the error of the early debate on missions and are meeting the needs

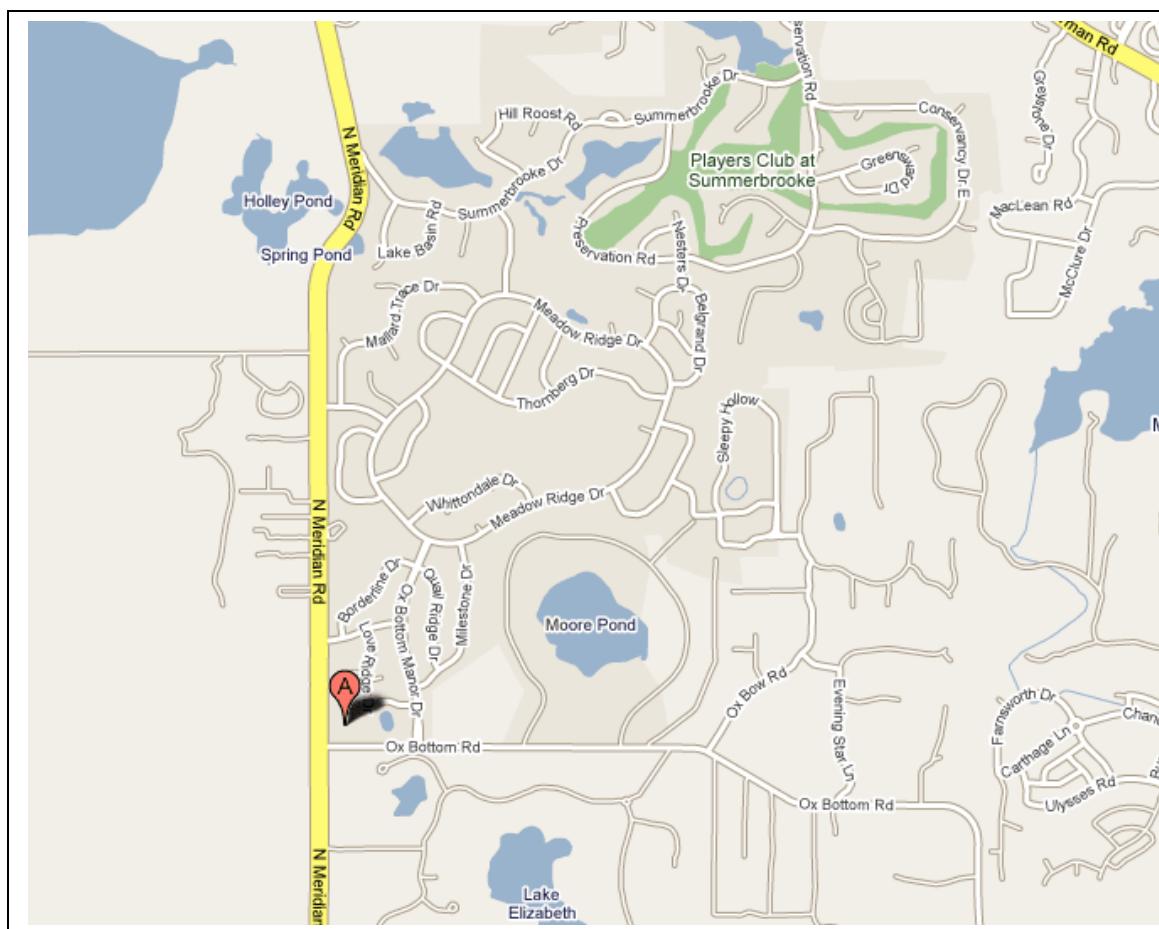
¹² Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2006), page 9.

of the community and losing the reconciliational nature of the gospel. However, if this new facility is seen as a tool to be used by the community, and therefore the church becomes incarnational in this community, then the relocation has enhanced the missional aspect of Wildwood. We must remember the lessons of the past, that doing good in the community for the sake of doing good is not advancing the Kingdom. It must be coupled with the proclamation of the Gospel. Although, Wildwood remains in a vestige of Christendom, that common experience is fading. We must become missional whether we build on the property or do not build. However, the conversion to Christ in today's culture is becoming radical different, and we must remember that 'conversion takes place over time is often the result of experiences, services, and community.'¹³ May Wildwood be such a church that incarnates the Gospel in this community.

¹³ Ed Stetzer and David Putman. *Breaking the Missional Code*. (Nashville, Broadman and Holman, 2006). page 124.

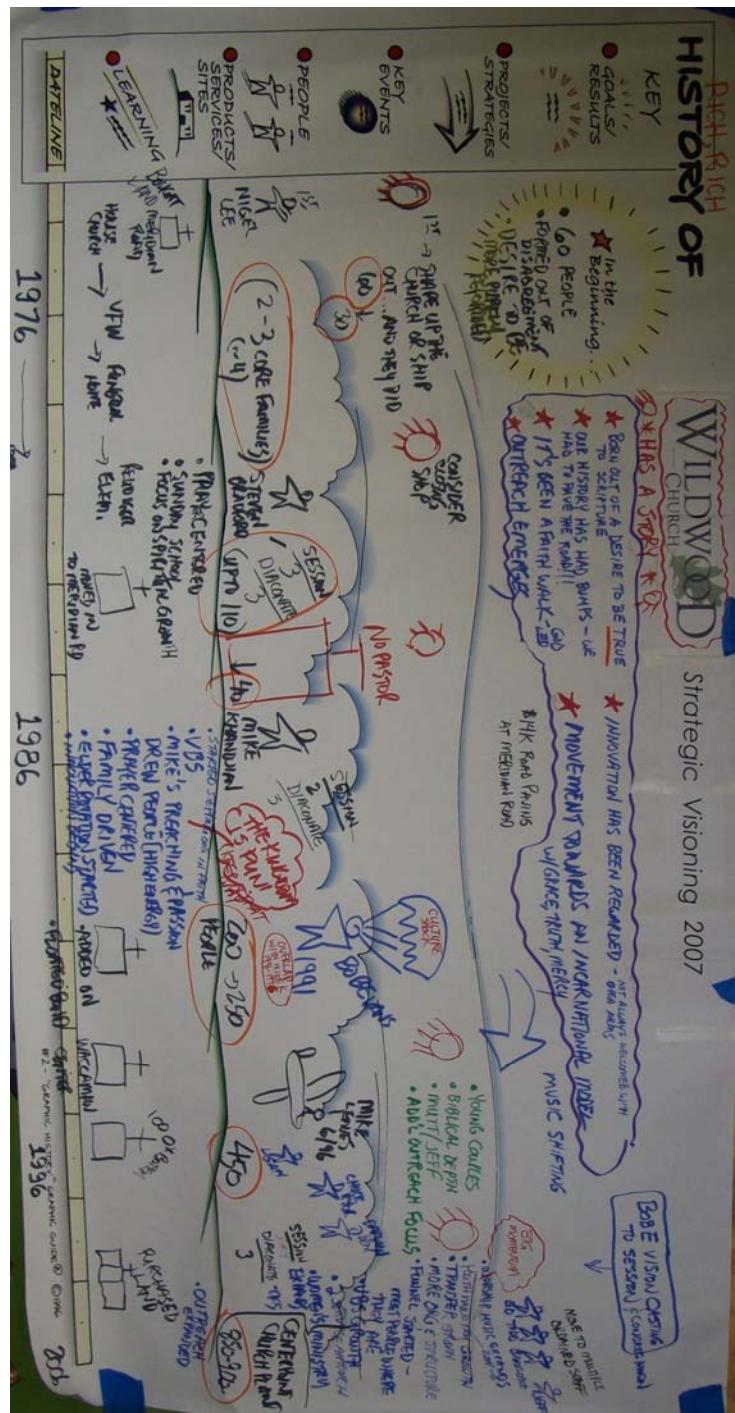
APPENDIX 1

MAP OF SURROUNDING AREA OF WILDWOOD



APPENDIX 2

GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF HISTORY OF WILDWOOD



APPENDIX 3

PHASES OF MINISTRY

The Ministry Time Line¹⁴

- I. Ministry Foundations (approximately 10 years, often from 16-26 years of age in heritage Christian)
 - Basic character, personality and underlying values are shaped
 - Potential leader comes alive to God through conversion or some major renewal experience
- II. Early Ministry (5-12 years)
 - Basic commitment to leadership is made
 - Basic leadership character is formed
 - Early experiences at ministering occur
 - Intimations of life purpose appear
 - Hints of giftedness emerge
- III. Middle Ministry (8-14 years)
 - Life purpose clarifies
 - Giftedness clarifies
 - Major role clarifies
 - Breakthrough insights for empowering people in ministry are learned
 - Conflict is faced
 - Authority issues are faced
 - There is efficient ministry (doing things right)
- IV. Latter Ministry (12+ years)
 - There is movement toward an ideal role
 - Efficient ministry becomes effective ministry (from doing things right to doing the right things right)
 - Peak ministry occurs
 - Ultimate contribution clarifies
- V. Finishing Well (?)
 - A lifetime of ministry is consolidated
 - Ultimate contributions are proactively developed
 - Important values are passed on to the rising generations of leaders

¹⁴ From “The Life Cycle of a Leader” by J. Robert Clinton and Richard W. Clinton, in Leaders on Leadership, George Barna, contributor and general editor, Regal Books, 1997, modified by Denise Kjesbo at Children’s Pastor Conference 2002

Formationals Priorities

1. Spiritual Formation – those things which shape the inner life
2. Ministerial Formation – those things which shape the leader to lead effectively – skills, giftedness and ministry insights which help the leader serve efficiently and effectively
3. Strategic Formation – those things which guide a leader to a specific life purpose and a major life role which results in ultimate contributions and lasting legacies

Formationals Priorities Applied to the Ministerial Time Line

I. Ministry Foundations

- Basic character formation
- Spiritual formation

II. Early Ministry

- Ministerial formation
- Spiritual formation
- (Strategic formation)

III. Middle Ministry

- Spiritual formation
- Ministerial formation
- Strategic formation

IV. Latter Ministry

- Strategic formation
- Spiritual formation
- (Ministerial formation)

V. Finishing Well

- Spiritual formation

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