

Ministry Plan 2019/2022

Hillcrest Covenant Church
Randy Bohlender, Senior Pastor

The Church I See

Hillcrest is a remarkable congregation with significant advantages that have been realized by the hard and faithful work of the people who have gone before as well as the unmerited favor of the Lord. Those who founded the church worked hard and sacrificed both time and finances so that we could worship and share the Gospel with fewer encumbrments than they faced.

There is much good in our foundation, and on that foundation, we are able to build.

The church I see being built on that foundation is one with significant commitment to prayer, to outreach, and pursuit of the Holy Spirit. These ideas stand in direct correlation to both scripture and the fresh direction of our denomination.

We will take on a variety of challenges and opportunities in coming years, but after much prayerful consideration, these are the three things that will form our priorities.

Prayer

Local Outreach

Pursuit of the Holy Spirit

Prayer

Prayer as a value has always received significant support at Hillcrest, although traditionally it has been a more private endeavor, or geared towards times of need. Public prayer has been primarily need-based (and there's certainly scriptural support for praying for the sick, asking God to intervene in our lives, etc).

Prayer as a vital part of worship or the daily regimen of our lives has received less emphasis. Prayer should be more than our fall back plan, it must be directly related to our identity. Short of engaging in prayer, we are no different than any group who meets. It is not just the beginning of our faith journey, it's an extension of it.

“My house will be called a house of prayer.” - Jesus

The church I see is one where we develop a corporate rhythm of prayer that expresses our devotion, gives God the honor He deserves, and shapes our hearts and decision making, training individuals and the corporate body to inquire of the Lord rather than rely only on the wisdom of man.

Corporate prayer causes us to lay aside our own plans. It intentionally inconveniences us. It forces us to abandon our assumption that everything is on our time, at our request. It makes us think as the body of Christ rather than the individuals in Christ. In doing it together, we become stronger.

The effectiveness of prayer is one of those rare things that increases exponentially. The Bible tells us that when we pray together, there is a power that is released that exceeds our own efforts, because when we pray corporately, God Himself attends the meeting.

Matthew 18:19,20

"Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

If we want to see revival - a great impact of God on our own hearts, in our families, and in culture - we need to take that request to God through unified prayer. In history, seasons of revival were always preceded by seasons of focused, corporate prayer.

2 Chronicles 7:14

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

History and scripture both tell us that we will face challenges internally, locally and nationally. Because of the hope of Christ, in times of despair, the church should have greater insight and wisdom than the secular world. That insight and wisdom come by asking. Historically, corporate prayer or a solemn assembly is God's prescription for people in crisis.

Joel 1:14

Consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord.

What God is building on the earth is a praying community that will partner with Him by saying yes to His plan. Our programs will ebb and flow, but prayer is both where the church is going and how it will get there.

Isaiah 56:7

These I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

Our monthly prayer nights are a front door to prayer, displaying what it can look like for people to pray together.

Their popularity points to a hunger among long time members, and they are well attended by many of the newer faces as well. They are a good taste-and-see event that honors God and encourages the body that we are working toward something together that is bigger than a program. We are looking to host the presence of God in a way that changes us and partners with Him to shape the future.

Near Future Initiatives

A two week series on corporate prayer through the history of the church.

We have much to learn from the prayer community of Bangor, Ireland in the 700s, where prayer and the reading of scripture preserved literacy long after most of Europe sunk into the dark ages, then the priests of Bangor spread out across Europe to bring the written Word to people, the Moravian prayer movement (who share common roots with the beginnings of the Covenant denomination), and other groups sought God in an intentional way through corporate prayer.

Expand the pastors' prayer time for needs on Tuesdays to include key intercessors from the intercessory team so we have more people gathering for prayer and sharing the load, or building a second gathering meeting for that at another time. Expand current Wednesday afternoon prayer times in the same manner.

Publish weekly email prayer guides coordinated with YouVersion involving common scripture reading and prayer focus to give people tracks to run on as they build their own prayer habits.

Repeatedly ask the question “Have we prayed about this?” to new initiatives or projects that the staff takes on, helping insure that we don’t get ahead of ourselves in programming without the leading of God.

Mid Future Initiatives

Further development and use of our prayer teams. We want to move them from a primarily responsive posture, praying for needs as they come to actively watching between services, etc for people who may need prayer but would not ask for it. For example, if we have someone wander in needing help between services, they should be met both with someone who can consider their physical needs as well as someone who can immediately pray with them. This will take empowering our prayer coordinator, Kathy Tilden, and moving her to report to the senior pastor rather than an associate pastor.

Integrating children into the prayer nights events by giving them a teaching time about prayer on a specific night and then bringing them in to participate by leading prayer for their families and other needs.

Develop more Sundays with prayer as a focus for certain groups - teachers at the launch of school, business owners at a different time, artists, etc. where we can announce “On this day we’re praying specifically for _____” in advance.

Prayer and teaching journeys - Often deeper prayer can come from a deeper understanding of needs and issues. In April of 2020, Joel Richardson will lead a tour to Israel to visit key sites as well as teach to group along the way. Later in the year, we will lead a prayer journey to Washington, DC, along with a tour of key historical places.

Longer Range Initiatives

Daily prayer rhythm. We will work towards offering daily prayer meetings - much smaller than our monthly events and led by staff or lay people in the chapel. One hour meetings would provide people a place to enter into the presence of God with brothers and sisters on the way to work, over their lunch hour, or in the evening. As we make gathering together in God's presence a priority, He responds and our efforts in work and ministry reflect His presence.

Assign prayer teams to key groups - Missions, the HGB, staff - so that during specific times of the year when the load is high (Budgeting, for instance) people are gathering to pray for those groups. We should be praying about our budget as much as we are planning our budget.

Suggested Resources

[The Complete Works of E.M. Bounds on Prayer](#)

E.M. Bounds

[Why Revival Tarries](#)

Leonard Ravenhill

TinyURL.com/HCCJonTyson

Jon Tyson speaking at The Square Church in Atlanta on the nature and history of revival.

Local Outreach / Outward Focus

Part of Hillcrest's rich history has been in the area of missions giving and mission trips. Short term trips probably accomplish more in the heart of the one going than is accomplished in the mission field - and this does not mean they are not worth doing. We do significant good, but even more than that, we come home more committed to missions than we were when we left. Youth mission trips are investments into our own kids that pay dividends for a lifetime. The student that goes to Costa Rica on a mission trip at 16 will be a lifelong mission giver and prayer supporter. Adult trips can provide highly skilled efforts in areas of the world where those skills are rare as well as give our people a window into the areas we support financially.

In contrast, our local outreach has not been emphasized as much, which allows for the perception that missions are something we support rather than do. Obvious exceptions would be things like our regular involvement in Freedom House, recent ministry to refugees, etc. Even in those important and valuable arenas, we manage to make the idea of missions something that happens further away rather than closer.

Jesus pictured a body of believers with impact both near and far. Following His death and resurrection, He specifically laid out expectations they would reach the world - but they would also reach their neighbor.

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

By focusing on local outreach, I want to reshape our thoughts on missions to include our mission to reach those we come in contact with every day.

While the child reached on a Freedom Fire outreach has significant disadvantages that we may easily address – and we should - they are no more or less lost than the person across the hall from our office or next door to our home. Both souls matter to God.

The Hillcrest family needs to develop a healthy missionary fervor regarding the people that they encounter every day. That missionary fervor will affect how we live outside the building and how we utilize the building itself.

Our green bag program has been a prototype of this sort of thinking. We have made it easy to do and access and have given out hundreds and hundreds of bags of groceries in the last year. Some contribute by filling bags, others are very intentional about disbursing them. We are starting to see the missional quality develop in a close-in sense. Further development will raise the value of serving locally - including in the church - as missional.

Near Future Initiatives

Continue to emphasize the outreach aspect of every Sunday morning gathering. While the seeker movement of the 1990s-2010s had glaring gaps (which churches like Willow Creek later freely admitted), we do need to remember that many who come in contact with Hillcrest do so for the first time on a Sunday morning. Because of that, our welcome teams, our hospitality, our language and the design of our space must be formed with some consideration that it is not only for our church family but for our guests. This will manifest itself in retraining volunteers, rethinking our design, and adjusting our consistency in things like student ministries.

Outreach Blasts. This is a church wide idea, encouraging people to use special events as an excuse to do something beyond normal expectation for people around them as an expression of the kindness of God, which the Bible tells us leads people to repentance.

Work Weekend. This is an extension of what Nate pioneered last year, where we identify one or two widows or single moms who need practical help on their house and volunteer to make the fixes. National Community Church in Washington, DC traditionally paints a single mom's home every Mothers Day weekend. By doing a lot of the prep in advance, we could do a significant makeover for someone.

Matthews Parties. In Matthew 9, Jesus celebrates with unlikely people, attending a dinner party among tax collectors. It set the religious people on edge but it certainly furthered the message of Jesus. I'm envisioning something similar to our local church block party - but designed to celebrate in a place and with people who can never pay us back, simply because they are valuable to Jesus.

Focus on stories of people at Hillcrest focusing on how they came to Jesus and what role the church played in that. These could be produced in short videos or a quarterly magazine style brochure that would encourage our own people that what we do in the way of outreach pays lasting dividends.

Mid Future Initiatives

Add Missional Small Groups. There are as many different small group types as there are people. Some, by design, are closed groups studying a specific topic for a specific season. Others are open groups that easily welcome in others - They look toward the group as a tool for reaching and encouraging people, not just growing together. We need more groups with this mentality that we can direct newcomers to check out.

Host an event focused on making participating in the foster care system accessible, as foster parents, CASA workers or respite workers, then consider follow up ministry focused events for those who are participating (Foster parent get togethers, etc).

Reorient Student Ministries to include a vision for our students' friends and circles of influence, planning bridge events that are better for inviting and engaging unbelievers.

Develop Trained Chaplains through Crisis Response International who can serve the community during times of local disaster response.

Further develop our thinking for women's and men's ministries to include bridge events. With a little encouragement, the recent Men's Axe Throwing event could have served as a great outreach and inviting mechanism.

Longer Range Initiatives

Develop an Outward Focus team of empowered volunteers who can both bring outreach suggestions to leadership as well as be willing to help work toward solutions. This would be like a local outreach special ops team who pioneer new outreaches to further the value of an outward focus. They would test the more risky opportunities like offering free prayer booth at public festivals.

Serve Saturdays. Based on the book Conspiracy of Kindness by my friend, Steve Sjogren, these are two-hour events where people assemble and are sent out in groups of 5-10 to do short, easy serving projects in our community, then regroup back at the church for pizza and stories. Projects are family friendly and easy for everyone - what Steve Sjogren refers to as "Low risk, High grace." His book should be required reading for where we are going. It takes the scary out of evangelism and teaches us how much we have to gain by serving.

Produce a regular podcast hosted by staff members that will give Biblical responses to common questions, experienced Christians' perspectives on parenting and other basic life skills from a Godly perspective. Pointed towards those who don't necessarily attend (or attend regularly), they are easy for our church attendees to share with friends. Many will listen to a podcast about practical Biblical matters before they would ever darken our door. When invited to attend, the idea is not as hard to consider because they will know some of the voices and personalities involved.

Updating the building with a newcomer's eye. Just as Nicole has updated the kids' entrance to be more inviting, we need to rethink the foyer and coffee areas, and to a lesser extent the auditorium through the perspective of someone coming for the first time. This would include paint, signage, etc.

Suggested resources:

[Conspiracy of Kindness](#)

Steve Sjogren

Pursuit of the Holy Spirit

The evangelical church in America (lower case e - meaning the larger movement rather than merely the Evangelical Covenant denomination), is in an exciting place of transition that would have been hard to imagine twenty years ago.

There may be some variation in thought on exactly how the Holy Spirit works, but the church is increasingly united behind the idea that He does work, and if He works, we must pursue Him.

"One of our Covenant affirmations is a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit. I want to meaningfully elevate this value, because a renewed focus on the Holy Spirit has been so life-giving to me personally. The Spirit is the one who brings the fire and the passion to know God and to make God known. The Spirit is the one who empowers us to proclaim and demonstrate the whole gospel. Any vision forward must proceed from the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We flourish through the Spirit."

John Wenrich, President

Evangelical Covenant Church

After decades of neglect, the larger church is beginning to wake up to the power and consolation available in the person of the Holy Spirit. As one local, conservative evangelical pastor expressed it to me, "For years we were open (to the Holy Spirit) but cautious. We are now admitting we've been more cautious than open, and we want that to change."

1 Corinthians 12:30,31

Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts.

In order to become who God wants us to be according to scripture, we too must weigh our openness and cautiousness accordingly. I am believing for a church more open than it has been in the past.

The world we live in has dictated terms in which a marginal Christianity, trodding along without the power of the Holy Spirit, cannot win. Any look at world and national events will reveal that darkness has increased - we need the inner flame of the Holy Spirit more than ever to help guide our thoughts about truth and empower us to stand.

Near Future Initiatives

Broaden our worship influences. The activity the Holy Spirit is closely tied to worship. We must develop a worship culture that is more reflective of freedom than form. Through working with existing staff worship leaders and inviting guests to stretch us to new expressions, we will explore worship more fully and find Him in those experiences.

Dedicate some of our prayer nights to seeking the Holy Spirit's presence and power in our lives. The Holy Spirit primarily manifests Himself where He is invited. Intentionally asking for His presence in our personal lives during these meetings can make a significant difference.

Mid Future Initiatives

Trim any excess activity from our services to allow for a response to what the Lord seems to be saying in the moment. With more clock to work with, we could afford to take more time to pray for healing, or allow for more of a response to something from the teaching.

Teaching further on the Holy Spirit on Wednesday nights

Broaden our influences. Hunger for the Holy Spirit increases with exposure. Introducing staff to other ministries through conferences as well as guest speakers who would understand Hillcrest's context would go far toward bringing us to a place of greater pursuit of the Holy Spirit.

Longer Range Initiatives

Host a regional conference at Hillcrest utilizing some of the speakers and influences that the staff has gleaned from.

Form visitation teams for hospitals who can, on an invitation basis, pray with faith for activity of the Holy Spirit to be present, allowing for healing and comfort beyond what one might imagine.

Suggested resources:

[Surprised by the Power of the Spirit](#)

Jack Deere

[The Quest for the Radical Middle](#)

Bill Jackson