

I Have a Dream WCBC 7 May

In every nation, on every continent there is a people group who are most open, most responsive to the gospel. Turn to the person beside you and tell them who that people group is.

Children.

We are told that the majority of people who make decisions to follow Jesus Christ are between

- a) 4-14**
- b) 14-40**
- c) 40-104**

Which one do you think it is?

Around 85% of people who choose to follow Jesus Christ will make that faith decision between 4-14 years of age.

So the most fruitful mission field to share the gospel to in the world are children between 4 & 14 years of age.

Now I am going to ask Jackie and Shania and Hilary just to cover their ears for a minute please. And now while they can't hear what I am about to say fully I will share with you that I have based what I am going to share with you this morning on the assumption that not everyone here always reads their newsletters thoroughly and may have missed some of our transparent communications over the past month. Ok sisters you can uncover your ears. Those of you who are church members are about to enter into what is going to be a very important and inspiring process, and there is an extremely high likelihood that what you decide and what you say over these next two months will significantly shape this church's future. But before we can begin the process we have to have in our minds a clear vision to work to.

In the early church every big decision was made the same way, the apostles or pastors and elders would pray and fast for direction, once they believed they had guidance from the Lord they would submit that direction to the members and then the church would say something like "it seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit" to set aside Paul and Barnabas for missionary work or to set aside 7 to look after the even distribution of food or ... or.

The leaders prayed, then the church prayed and if the church affirmed the direction the leaders got then the church would start something new, or make a radical change.

Before you called me to be your pastor at Central many, many people said that Central was a church of good people but without a unifying vision. And that people had tried to pull together vision from the roots up and it hadn't worked. You knew when you called me to be your pastor that I was a man who believed in seeking God for specific vision and a person who had seen God exponentially grow every church I have pastured. The key to that happening hasn't been to copy another church or to repeat what has worked before but to seek God in prayer with a small group of elders and then to submit a clear, unique, specific vision to the members and then to follow that vision.

God has always spoken and He has always been faithful even when the vessel or vessels have made mistakes and been less than perfect or spoken too fast. Vision is not some rewording of Matt 28 the great commission, or love God and love people, or be all things to all people, vision will build on the prophetic foundations of a church and be specific to each church. Real vision creates a picture of the future that we can move towards by faith. When you have a vision that says we are going to reach out to seniors or new immigrants or young adults etc no one is left out. Though vision sets the flavour and influences all of the church's choices, we still love everyone and God finds amazing ways of showing individuals and ministry teams how they can support the vision.

The prophetic foundations of this church are that this church from the start has always supported other Northern churches, both Baptist and non Baptist, plus it has ministered to families.

Last year when I was praying about whether we should join the team at central, I found I could get excited about blessing other churches and other ministries and I began to get pictures around how effective this could be in reaching out to children.

One of the first and strongest pictures I had was of the old hall and lounge 1 area. Now I have always loved children's ministry and have always mentored many, many children and youth, especially the fatherless; but the love that I felt in my heart towards children's ministry felt even stronger.

The first picture I had of the old hall/ entrance/ lounge 1 area was a shocker. It was so extreme I just opened my eyes and went, really God. Wow. You see I saw an area that could best be described as a family centre. About ¼ of it looked like 'Chipmunks', there was a modern cafe through the centre with art

on the walls that helped children identify with the space and an area set up in the lounge 1 zone with great family activities and games. From a child's perspective it looked like the most child friendly church I have ever seen. I saw us taking care of our own children and investing in them so intentionally and cohesively across the ministries and across the stages of their development. I became very, very aware of things that I have read many times stating that in the west the children of Christian families are leaving the church in droves and that whole tragedy is turned around when children are not silo'd in their own age groups all the time, where they learn to minister and where they have intergenerational relationships. Pastor Stephen said to me, as I have read and as I have heard many like Raewyn say that a young person needs 5 or more meaningful relationships outside of their family if they are to stay and grow in the church long term. That it takes at least 5 non parent adults to love on our kids as well and for them to be involved in intergenerational ministry kept going around in my thoughts.

Not only did I see 'the village' raising each child to mature faith but I saw those children we minister to through Lynk or Rock Solid or Frontline coming to church on Sunday, joining in our services and the Sunday school programs and also finding 5 or so parent and grandparent figures to mentor and love them for the long haul. I realise as I look at our church that we have so many mature people of great faith who can be that surrogate spiritual parent or grandparent and change generations to come.

Instead of praying with a small group of elders for several months as has been my custom when I had the week off post my sinus op I just felt to write down for our full leadership team what I felt God had been saying to me re-vision. They have very prayerfully considered and affirmed and improved what I wrote that week and the three transparent communications on yellow slips this past month have been the results.

I want to read to you the possible mission and vision statements from the last one. Now bear in mind that what has been shared with you is a work in progress. A mission statement is usually just three or four words that capsule the purpose of a church. We have suggested

Proposed Mission Statement

"Raising Christian World Changers – Blessing the Churches of the North"

Now that is longer than the ideal but it does say what a mission statement should say.

Vision statements rather than being brief should paint a vivid picture of what the church should look like in the future.

This is our **Proposed Vision Statement**

We at WCBC aspire to be a church that will impact the North through helping Tamariki meet Jesus and then to continually grow in faith.

We will intentionally help our children know that they are the children of today (not tomorrow).

We want to create a culture, a facility and services where our Tamariki will come to consider WCBC as their second home.

We want a discipleship strategy that will keep our young people growing in faith well into adulthood.

We want to put their needs above our own and develop a faith community that our grandchildren will want to be a part of.

We want to invest in the lives of our Tamariki so that our legacy of faith will continue on for generations and impact tens of thousands of lives.

We believe that through this generation we will reach adults, families and the community.

We have a heart to bless and support the churches of the North.

We have begun to move towards this vision in the worship teams on Sunday and I just want to say I so applaud the hymn team for their grace and skill and the worship team for the effort and prayer they have put into our worship times this past month in particular. We can all feel an increased freedom and more of His presence. Thank you!

I would love it if the three weeks surrounding every term break are totally all-age-worship services and if the first 25 minutes of every service is absolutely child friendly and engaging.

As we try things out and learn from each other going forward I want to say there are two extremes we want to avoid if possible.

At one extreme we don't want the music to get too loud. Worship should never hurt your ears or the ears of young children and our seniors. Secondly we need to avoid adding any more slow songs to our repertoire. We can enjoy a whole range of songs in between and while I love children's songs any song

that you put actions to is a song that they will enjoy. Imagine if musicians welcomed alongside junior musicians and mentored them. Imagine if there was a couple of mic's free every Sunday for people 14 years of age or under and there was space for kids to lead action songs, to shake percussion instruments and to wave ribbons. I foresee worship teams one day being made up of every aged person and children taking up the offering, leading in prayer, helping with communion etc.

Over the past three months I have read so many books and so many articles. Most of them just say that churches in the west are losing our kids and children, stating what the problem is. There have been however a few resources that I have found really helpful.

Helen and Monica have resourced me well and I will keep working through material. There is no church I can find which is called to do what I believe we are here at central but from these resources we can get some idea.

The article I have enjoyed the most and found very helpful and concise is called "12 Reasons to Welcome Kids in Church + Tips for Actually Doing It". There are copies of this in the foyer and it is on the website.

Another good resource is the Baptist Union's "The Foundations of Ministry & Mission with Children and Families". Shania has put a post-it tab on the most helpful page of resources and website links.

If you were looking for something deeper that will challenge the way you view the church and our young people Stephen Battye recommended to me a book called "Growing Young" and although this is about the church discipling 14 plus young adults I believe that the principles and the small group discussion questions are probably the greatest tools we have to help us navigate the way forward.

When I was a young man I went to the front for every altar call and got whatever I could from any Christian meeting. There was nothing wrong with that. Over the years however I have come not to see church as a place I can get but a place I can give. When I came to Christ it was during the charismatic renewal in NZ and as a result I just love Scripture in Song, some of those old songs still bring tears to my tough old eyes. But something has permanently changed in me. When I come to church nowadays, it's not what I can get from God or from Church that matters, it's not what is the church doing for me but ... what will my little granddaughter experience of God today, how can I help

her to know this is her home and the God of the Bible is totally trustworthy. If we never sing a Scripture in Song song in this church ever again, but we do church, in such a way, that my Anna grows to love Jesus, that means everything to me.

Last week I observed something of profound value to her development that most of us would have missed. As Juliette and Anna arrived at church Jeff Neilsen greeted them both by name and talked personally to little Anna. After church as Juliette spoke with a great lady in this church Jeff played "What's the Time Mr Wolf" with my Anna. Last week that man was one of the 5, one of the people God will use through this church to cause my little girl not to be another statistic at 18 but a woman of God for life.

This church has more mature Christians percentage-wise than any other church I have known. If we can all learn to be as selfless and as caring as that man was to my little girl last week, if we can put their needs above ours, we will raise a generation of world changers, we will impact generations for the kingdom and leave a legacy that will bless this nation. Christianity is in decline in the western world but I believe in Whangarei, in fact in the North, we have the calling, the faith and the capacity to turn that totally around.

Jesus was the busiest man that ever lived. Everybody wanted His attention and help. Important people always wanted to debate with him. In Matthew's Gospel in chapter 19 Mathew records a profound incident

¹³Some people brought their children to Jesus, so that he could place his hands on them and pray for them. His disciples told the people to stop bothering him. ¹⁴But Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and don't try to stop them!"

Church, we are about to enter into a process, a process where we will seek God as a membership, a process where we will consider what it will look like to become a church that is excellent at letting the children come to Jesus and then investing in them through to adulthood; a church full of people who will be one of the 5 for hundreds of young people. I would love you to prayerfully enter the process with us.

What will happen

Prayer, reflection

Ideally end of June meeting every Trust in the church and each of these prayer and planning teams report back to what could be the most exciting church meeting you will ever go to. But we are not a business. Better to get it right than to force things through on time.

After the church members have heard what God is saying through the ministry teams, the new elders, Stephen and I will develop a plan going forward and bring it back to the membership.