

A Vision for a Church in RSM

Can you imagine:

- a community of people young and old that knows more about one another than each other's name?
- a community in which you have genuine relationships?
- where people know who you are and love you still?
- a place where you're free to be you?
- a community of people seeking to know the heart of God together?
- a place where the entire family is strengthened?
- a place where fathers and mothers are equipped and supported in parenting?
- where husbands and wives can find healing and answers for their marriages, as well as, the constant encouragement to remain healthy?
- a community of people so known for their love that all who know them speak well of them?
- a place where loving your neighbor is more than a good idea, it's a way of life?
- a community of families coming together to have fun, to encourage each other in parenting and marriage, to spur one another on to genuine faith in Jesus and to touch our community with his love?
- a community of Christians all working together to fulfill a common purpose and vision?
- a place where it's not about hierarchy and politics, rather, it's about discerning the heart of God and working as a team?
- a place where mentoring and leadership development are vital and on-going?
- where service is an action, not a meeting?
- a community where the greatest motivation is love?

Can you imagine such a community? I can.

This is not merely a paper. It is an invitation to be a part of the greatest call of all...establishing the kingdom of God on this earth so that all men might acknowledge their creator and *"glorify Him on the day of his coming."*

This invitation will be read by many people from many different walks of life and religious backgrounds. I am not purporting some "new way" of doing ministry. Many of the thoughts and concepts discussed in this paper are already being implemented in congregations throughout the world. This is, however, a vision of what my heart has been impassioned to do and is a reflection of my philosophy of ministry and leadership. This philosophy of ministry and leadership has been developed through the various opportunities God has given me to serve, lead, and study over the past many years.

We are grateful for our beginnings and owe much to Florence Avenue Foursquare Church. Support from the church staff and congregation has greatly increased our immediate opportunities and has given us a jumpstart in ministry we would not have otherwise had. We carry in us the healthy DNA of a church that has maintained a steady pattern of growth and ministry effectiveness for over 75 years. What an honor it is and privilege to be part of a church with such a rich heritage and vibrant future.

The first section of this paper establishes the purpose and goal of the Church in this world. The remainder will focus on the birth and ministry of this church plant over the next 10 years. The focus will be on the direction and heart of our ministry while giving hands and feet to it for visual simplicity. With the framework in place the details are yet to be filled in. That is where you come in!

Section 1: The Purpose and Goal of The Church

Embracing Chaos

Jesus promised us trials and difficulties in this world. James says to consider them pure joy because they will accomplish the purpose of sanctification. In that, God will use them to scrape away the layers of our “self-centered nature” and cause us to look more like Him. The “Christ-centered nature” has begun within us through the working of the Holy Spirit. In this journey God has asked us not to fear the chaos of life, for He will use it to accomplish the mission and purposes for which He has called us. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (NIV Romans 8:28-29). All of us come to God from unique situations and circumstances. But, for each one the destination is the same- *“to be conformed to the likeness of his Son...”* The goal of the church is to help guide believers through trials, ever keeping in sight the destination- becoming a disciple of Jesus. However, the church itself must also be able to embrace the trials and difficulties the world offers, with a determined focus on the specific destination set forth by God. Scientists have given their own term to the phenomenon we call trials. They call them chaos. Chaos is simply the unforeseen disruptions to our life, organization or ministry. Chaos is: the sudden death of a loved one; being told your spouse is leaving you; going in for a routine physical and hearing the word terminal; finding out the treasurer has been embezzling thousands of dollars; the unexpected death of a co-worker; the resignation or termination letter sitting on your desk when you arrive to work; managerial back-stabbing; economic crash; economic explosion; internal conflict; external conflict; wild fires in the canyon...

I think you get the idea.

No one can predict it, but every church and business will go through seasons of chaos. In our attempt to minimize its affect upon our organizations we’ve built complex corporate structures, elaborate pyramid schemes, employee handbooks and policy after policy. It seems that every time a new conflict arises we feel the need to make a new policy to protect ourselves from having to deal with it again. But no matter how many policies we make we will never eliminate chaos or its effects. What then shall we do? Our options are limited to two: we can **fear** chaos, or we can **embrace** it. You see, control is only a myth. We cannot really control anything. The economy, world affairs, internal conflict, competition, family turmoil, and death are all out of our control. A structure cannot be built strong enough to withstand all of life’s chaos. Just as the walls of Jericho crumbled, so too will organizations who take security in them. Consider the amount of corporations that have come crashing down in this decade alone. They had elaborate structures, and policy books that could rival any Bible. Enron is probably the most well known of all. Their walls fell with a force so strong it sent shock waves throughout the nation. Thousands of lives were thrown into chaos. Consider how our nation’s economy was affected by 2 jumbo jets flown into two skyscrapers. The chaos that followed was felt throughout the world. But how can we embrace something that seems so unexpected?

Without going into great detail let me explain some fascinating discoveries that have been made by scientists studying chaos theory. Through quantum physics scientists have been researching this for years. As scientists introduced chaos to subatomic particles through

various stimuli, something remarkable took place. Using digital technology to display a portrait of the effects, they found that initially the patterns created were indeed chaotic. However, after a short while something phenomenal happened. The display began to show an elaborate system of patterns and colors. They were organized and consistent. Even at magnification of 1 million the same identifiable patterns could be seen. In short, scientist concluded that chaos is working toward order (Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*).

When applied to real life, these quantum theories seem to tell us that chaos in our lives will eventually work toward order if we allow it. But isn't that what God has promised already? "We know that in **all** things God works for the good of those who love him..." God has promised us that in **all**, every, situation(s) of life- no matter how chaotic- He will reorder them for our good (Rom. 8). That's why James says to "consider it pure joy my brother when you endure hardship of any kind, because we know that the testing of our faith produces perseverance..." He says to have joy in times of struggle because it will eventually result in our growth and strengthening.

Navigating the Church

Churches are no exception. They endure all kinds of chaos. The question to ask is, "What is it that helps us navigate chaotic storms so that we may reach the destination for which we embarked. Leonard Sweet points out in his book *Aqua Church* that sailors would navigate by looking to the North Star. No matter how big the waves swelled or how hard the wind blew sailors could fix their eyes on it and navigate their way. Churches and businesses that fix their eyes on their vision will be able to embrace the change that chaos authors.

Therefore, the goal of a church or business should be to build a system and culture that is navigated by its vision. The goal is a system not structure. A system is fluid and can adapt to changing environments and pressures without losing focus. A structure is firm. It tries to resist pressures and has an aversion to change. We live in a day and age of constant change and we must be able to adapt quickly, easily and constantly.

The destination of every church is the establishment of God's kingdom, first in its Jerusalem, then its Judea and Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth.

"Thy Kingdom Come"

God's kingdom refers to His kingdom power and kingdom virtues. The establishment of such is the destination of the church. Jesus prayed, "*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...*" Where the church is, God's kingdom is also. This is not however a static state of being. Kingdom establishment is on-going. It is a destination that will **not** be realized until the new order has been established (*Rev 21:44 "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*). The force that guides all of God's kingdom is love (God's unconditional Agape love). This love is the most powerful force in the universe. The apostle Paul writes, "*37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rom 8:37-39.*" As people appropriate this power in their lives the kingdom of God is established.

The church that is infused with this power will become a powerful force in their area. The love of God transforms us and those around us. *God's love is transmitted through **relationship**.* For any Christ-follower there are 3 levels of relationship through which love is transmitted: between us and God, between the family of believers, and the community outside his family. **Therefore, the primary desire of the church is the establishment of the kingdom of God, through love, in every level of relationship.**

Section 2: The Vision and Direction of Our Church

This vision will focus on 3 areas:

1. Our Relationship with God
2. Our Relationship with our Family
3. Our Relationship with our Community

Our Relationship with God

Our relationship with God is cultivated through devotion and service. **Devotion** to God is an inward journey that winds its way through our internal lands of fear and insecurity and finds its way to the kingdom of our Father. Into his very throne room until it comes to rest in His loving arms. **Service** to God encapsulates all of our responses to life and people. It is a quest that results from knowing the agape love and unconditional acceptance of our heavenly Father.

The Inward Journey

At the center of every person is a desire for love and affection. We were created with a need to be loved and accepted. We often seek to find this love and acceptance through relationships, friendships, possessions, positions, occupations, various kinds of service and more. None of these things or anything else in this physical world will bring the lasting fulfillment we crave. Our loving creator fashioned this part in us so that his signature might always be upon His masterpiece. It also serves as a reminder of our eternal beginnings and nature. **Therefore, the deepest desire of man's heart is to know an unconditional love and acceptance that will never end.** Only God can provide an unadulterated, unconditional, and unending love.

Since then, our heart's deepest desire is to be loved and accepted by God, the inward journey is simply the moving closer to our heart's desire- which is God himself. In her book, Thoughts Matter, Margaret Funk writes:

"According to John Cassian, a fourth century monk, three renunciations are required of us if we are on that journey [the inward journey]. First, we must renounce our former way of life and move closer to our heart's desire, toward the interior life. Second, we must do the inner work (of asceticism) by renouncing our mindless thoughts. This renunciation is particularly difficult because we have little control over our thoughts. Third and finally, we must renounce our own images of God so that we can enter into contemplation of God as God."

--emphasis [] added.

The inward journey encompasses all that we have deemed "spiritual disciplines." When we have made the work of the inward journey part of our life we will be freed from having to use anything of this world to bring temporary fulfillment. Only then will we truly be ready to do the work of the outward journey.

Simply put, as we grow in the security of God's love by developing a relationship with Him, we will be able to love and serve others without selfish motives.

The Outward Journey

This journey is much easier to explain. If devotion is an inward journey that moves us closer to God and past our insecurities and fears, then devotion is the result of that journey. It is the freedom to live a life conformed into the likeness of Jesus. It is the opportunity to live a "holy" life. A life separated and devoted to the purposes of God. The outward journey is where the rubber meets the road. It encompasses all of our responses and actions (private and public). It is yielding to the Spirit's refining of these actions and responses into the image of our savior. ***Only after we have experienced the freedom and security of unconditional love can we truly give it to a hurting world. Only then can we act without selfish motives carefully camouflaged by good intent.*** This is the kind of light Jesus referred to that would shine bright in a dark world.

The outward journey applies very specifically to our response and obedience to the voice of God. Our goal is to become more like Jesus in responses to life and people, and to demonstrate the same willingness availability to the voice of God that He had. Our example is our Savior who "was obedient to death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:8)!" It's the surrender that says, "nevertheless, not my will but yours be done. (Luke 22:42)"

Spiritual Conversation

--I am excited to discuss the great hunger for God that has been kindled through our weekly discussion groups that have been meeting throughout the city of Rancho Santa Margarita. Men's and women's groups have been meeting in public places such as Starbucks, Tutu Fresco, and other spots to discuss the nature and goodness of God. Many people have joined the groups since their inception. Most come to discuss some to listen and many have joined in simply from overhearing the conversations.

Thursday Night Prayer

--Our Thursday night prayer meeting is a vital part of our church's life. 75% of our congregation makes it a regular part of their devotion to be there. As a body we have learned to seek the Lord and to cry out to him as the only source of power and hope that will save our community. Many of the sick in our church have come and been healed. Now many have started bringing family members and co-workers to the service for prayer and Jesus has been revealed to them in power.

Scripture Reading Journals

--Bible reading has become a passion for our congregation. Everyday, you can find people from our church scattered throughout Rancho Santa Margarita reading their Bible and writing in their journals. You cannot walk into Starbucks without finding someone with their Bible open and their pen in hand intently looking into God's Word. The distinct logo of the church makes it obvious to others that they are a committed follower of Jesus and that they love people. You find them in parks and down by the lake in the same posture. Many can be seen studying on their lunch break. There has become an almost insatiable appetite to know God through his Word.

Sunday Services

--Sunday has become a day of celebration. They are exciting. There is always an air of excitement and anticipation when we come together. People come with hearts overflowing with thankfulness and gratitude toward God for all of His blessings during the week. The moment worship begins it is as if an explosion of love bursts forth as we express through music all that feel toward God. It is contagious. It is frequently confessed by many that they could not help but forget their worries and become captivated by a great awe of God.

Our worship team has just released their third album. This year teams from all over the country will be coming for a weekend conference. Some of the premier leaders and trainers will be on hand to teach workshops on worship technique and theology. Our contemporary yet classical sound has been able to transcend generations. The guitar is accompanied masterfully by the smooth tones of brass and the soft whine of the strings. A phenomenal percussion section and keyboardist make the sound experience alive and full. Many of the local high school band students have joined our team along with industry professionals. There is an ongoing mentorship happening as experienced musicians give time to develop aspiring ones.

The message is shared with an equal amount of fervor and passion. As God's Word is shared, hearts are open and receptive. The relevance and practicality of each message make it easily applicable to everyday life. Many are moved to respond immediately to His truth and people are opening their hearts to Jesus weekly.

Our Relationship with Our Family

Family is a broad term. There 3 types of family: 1. Our physical immediate family; 2. Our spiritual church family; 3. Our heavenly family of believers at large.

- 1) Our Physical Immediate Family- refers to the relationships between fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, and children (step & original).
- 2) Our Spiritual Church Family- refers to the group of believers that God brings together, with their unique gifts, talents, abilities, passions, and experiences, to form a body through which he establishes his kingdom.
- 3) Our Heavenly Family of Believers At Large- is similar to our church family differing in that it represents all believers (locally and globally).

While none are more important than the other, a proper concept and participation in all of them is vital for every thriving believer.

Immediate Family

You don't have to be a rocket scientist or psychologist, for that matter, to notice that the family unit is under attack. Divorced and single parent homes are becoming the norm while two-parent, original marriage homes are becoming the exception. The enemy of mankind has made the erosion of the home a top priority. Now there are many circumstances through which divorce has come upon families. No two situations are the same. But it is worth us asking the question, "Was God's intent for marriage and family (yes, it was God's idea and design) to be what it has become?" If the answer is "No" then we realize God not only has a plan but has given the ability to carry out his plan to all of his followers ("His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him..." 2Pet. 1:3)

That means he has given us all we need to love our husbands and wives with an unending love. It means he gives patience and wisdom for parenting. He offers what is needed to create a relationship of love between parents and teens. Whatever the relationship may be, He has given us all we need to build it into something vibrant and joyful. God designed the family and He will infuse it with His love and power if we allow Him.

It is the desire of our church to effectively minister to the family at every stage of its development. Dr. H. Norman Wright looks at these stages as a cycle. He calls it the "family life-

cycle.” Looking at the family at each level of development illuminates the wide variety of challenges faced by today’s family. It is critical that churches look to address these challenges in order help provide the support and tools families need. When was the last time you saw a class on “How to be a grandparent,” or “How to transition from parent to friend?” We usually assume that having grandkids makes us a good grandparent. But what do the parents of those grandkids think? How many family conflicts and divisions have been created due to disagreements about child rearing and discipline? Nobody is born an expert in these fields. The family learning curve is continuous for all of us. That is why it is more crucial now than ever that the church teaches these Godly principles and truths from his Word. We all need support and encouragement in this battle for the family.

The family is under attack like never before. The enemy of our souls has launched a full-scale blitzkrieg against it. How then, do we defend our families against the constant borage coming against it? First, we pause to remember, “the One who is in you, is greater than the one who is in the world (1John 4:4).” It doesn’t matter how scary this world becomes. We will not be overcome by it. The power of Satan against the Christian was absorbed in the cross and buried in the tomb- never to resurrect again. The only power he has over the believer is what he can deceive us into believing he has. Although this is true, the Master of Deception tries to use times of struggle and weakness to convince us otherwise or distract us from that truth. That is why fellowship (real relationship) with other Christians is so vital.

Hebrews 10 says, “Do not forsake the gathering with other believers.” For it is in those times that we can remind each other of the goodness and power of God. We often need others to snap us back into reality. That is why the popular thinking of, “I don’t need to go to church. I can have my own relationship with God. I don’t need other people.” is so dangerous. Isolationism is a tool of the enemy. He loves to hear Christians say these things. The voice of the enemy is amplified in the darkness of isolation. Consider that captors have, for years, practiced this demoralizing technique. They will separate POWs and make them think they are all alone. The goal is to crush their spirit and resistance until they have lost all hope of escaping.

Conversely, Alexander the Great, arguably one of the greatest leaders in human history, had a unique way of organizing his troops. He formed them into cohorts (groups) that would not only fight together, but eat, sleep, and play together. It is even reported that during times of battle if there were to be an emergency at home one of the cohort members would return to watch over all of the families. What an amazing picture of unity and togetherness. No one was alone. No one fought the battle alone.

We were not intended to fight this battle for our families alone either. God’s purpose for the church can be seen clearly in Acts 2. At the time of its inception Luke records that they were in constant fellowship: breaking bread, worshiping, taking communion, studying His Word, and having fun. The result of this kind of fellowship was the daily growth of their numbers and the favor of all the people in the community. Wow! What an awesome design and plan.

Culture has changed a lot since that time. So has the church. But God’s purpose and design has not! We live in a culture and time when religion has become a compartmentalized segment of life. We live in planned (compartmentalized) communities that have their school zones, industrial zones, retail zones, and church zones. People have become accustomed to relegating church into “that thing we do on Sunday.” But church is not a place, it is a people- the people of God. Where the people of God go, so goes his church (“And in him you too are being

built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” Eph. 2:22). Jesus said to the Samaritan woman in John 4, “a time is coming and has now come when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” She was concerned with the place for worship. Jesus made it clear that it was not about the place, it was about the person and heart.

Church Family

Wayne Cordeiro talks about the difference between churches with a cruise ship mentality and churches with a battleship mentality. Those on cruise ships are there for the ride. They are there to be fed. They gorge themselves on buffets and fine dining. The crew is there to serve the passengers and wait on them. Contrast that with a battleship where everyone on board has an assignment and task to accomplish. It is through the cooperative effort of everyone that the ship runs effectively.

These days, it is common to hear the term “being fed” in the same sentence as church. We are moving more and more into a consumer mentality in the church. It is a mentality that says, “As long as I am consuming more than I am giving this is a good church for us.” Families test-drive different churches until they find one that fits. The whole motivation is “What can we get?” not, “How can we serve?”

The Bible makes it very clear that God has given every believer gifts “as He has determined so that the body may be built up.” There are no accidents with God. He has a plan for every one of our lives. Psalms 139 says, “every day ordained for me was written in your book before even one of them came to be.” The simple fact is that he has called us to be a part of the congregation (body) we are in and he has given us gifts to be used in that body. ***God’s master-plan for the church is a complex integrated system of relationships and giftings, all flowing in the same direction.*** It is an entire group of people working together to fulfill the vision of establishing His kingdom in their community. It is the picture of a battleship setting sail to accomplish its mission.

The great challenge before every church is the process of equipping people and releasing them in ministry. This challenge becomes even greater when a church has a strong commitment to quality. It is the temptation of many churches to grab warm bodies and allow them to serve even though they know little about what they are doing. Equally tempting, is the ideal of placing people in ministry positions based solely on “passion” alone. Someone may say, “I have a passion to preach.” but they have no ability to do so. The church must maintain their commitment to quality while carefully navigating the sensitive waters of ministry placement. But a church must never compromise on quality for the sake of feelings. Many churches have a mentality that says, “As long as they are dedicated, that’s all that matters.” To this idea Norman Shawchuck writes, “dedicated incompetency is still incompetency.” If we are truly working as unto the Lord, we ought to do everything with the highest quality possible. Shawchuck goes on to say, “...the conversation should not end there, for even if God can excuse poor quality, the ‘thirty-something’ generation (the very generation we must reach if our congregations are to still be around in the year 2050) has already proven that it will not -- neither in education for their children, nor in dishwashing soap, and certainly not in religion.” –**Benchmarks of Quality in the Church; Shawchuck & Rath.**

If only there was a good example found in Scripture of how this process of equipping and releasing might be accomplished.

Thankfully, there is.

Matthew 4:18-22 records the initial calling of our Savior as he drafted his team of leaders that would later turn the world upside down. From their leadership and testimony His church was established. So what profound words did he use to inspire them give up everything and become his disciples? Verse 19 “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Hardly inspiring! Where was the great promise of eternal wealth, adventure, happiness? No such promises. Only “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Those words must have rung in their hearts over and over as they reminisced about their calling. But why **those** words? Why include them in the eternity of Scripture?

It was because our Savior wanted to lay out his plan for taking ordinary people and releasing them into extraordinary ministry. He was sharing with them his master plan for discipleship. It is a three-step plan: Come; Follow; Go. First, they had to **Come** to know Him: His heart, character, and passions. Second, they learned what it meant to **Follow** him: his teaching, ways, spiritual disciplines. It was only after these things took place in their lives that they were commissioned to “**Go** and make disciples of all nations...” They are later instructed about three distinct parameters: Jerusalem, Judea & Samaria, the ends of the earth.

Coming:

- to know His heart
- to know His character
- to know His passions

Following:

- His teaching
- His disciplines
- His leadership

Going:

- serving Jerusalem (Rancho Santa Margarita)
- serving Judea & Samaria (South Orange County)
- serving ends of the earth (Everywhere else in the world)

The more we come to know Jesus, the more we understand his love. The more we understand his love, the more we desire to follow after him. The more we desire to follow him, the more willing we are to go where he calls. Come! Follow! Go!

We bring this same process of equipping and releasing into our church. This is accomplished by providing programs and opportunities that will help them: come to know Jesus and his love, learn follow his teaching and direction, and to discover their unique gifts and passions so they can go and serve where he calls.

However, the most significant part of the process of equipping for Jesus and his disciples was relationship. Jesus chose to live among them. He poured his life into them. He even called them his friends. They saw his agony, triumph, and indignation. The Son of God became vulnerable and transparent with them. Authentic relationship was a vital part the process. He was no doubt “real” with them and was unafraid to be so.

Relationships are the key to everything! They will be critical in the ongoing growth process for someone learning to follow Jesus. They are also vital for continued growth in areas of ministry.

No one should serve alone. Every person should be pouring their gifts, talent, and expertise into someone else willing to learn. That's multiplication. There is no greater joy and purpose for a leader than to multiply himself or herself into someone else. It ensures continued ministry and quality. It frees people from having to carry the load of a ministry alone. Although, some people enjoy this weight and love to tell everyone about it, it is not healthy. Those who have a hard time multiplying their gifts and talents are serving with wrong motives. The goal is to have a multiplying church where every area of ministry is deep with well equipped servants. This enables a church to multiply itself over and over through church planting.

Conversely, a lack of multiplication paralyzes churches and ministries. How can a church send off leaders to start a new church joyfully, when their absence leaves a ministry void? How can Sally Mae afford to be sick or miss church when she is the only one who can do puppets for the children? How Billy Bob afford to take a vacation when he's the only one who knows how to EQ the sound correctly? A lack of multiplication can have many adverse affects upon a church. Therefore, multiplication must be a priority and part a highly effective church's DNA.

Heavenly Family

We are not going to RSM to start a church! The Church already exists. You may be confused by my saying this but let me explain. As previously stated, the primary desire of the church is the establishment of the kingdom of God, through love, in every level of relationship. This is already happening there. God has already called many churches to shine His love and establish His kingdom in that place. Let's call them, collectively, "The Church of Rancho Santa Margarita." In Revelation the church is likened to a lamp stand. Jesus declared to all of his followers that they "are the light of the world." John 1 says that the Word (Jesus) was a light that has come into this dark world. As his representatives, indwelt with his Spirit, we are called to reflect that same light. Combined, The Church of RSM, they shine with a certain intensity. Some churches may shine brighter than others, but all are giving off His light. We have been called to add even greater intensity to the light He has established. Humbly, we answer his call to partner with the various churches already serving the area. ***As denominational barriers bow to the unifying vision of his heart, the light of his love will radiate.***

Our vision for the heavenly family does not stop there however. It extends to every part of the world. The church of Jesus Christ at large is the totality of His light in this world. We value the partnering with churches abroad through financial giving and through missions teams. It is always encouraging to remember that we are part of something greater.

Family Life Ministry

--We continue to hear one testimony after another about how practical and impacting our family ministries have been. As of this year we have been able to develop a separate ministry team for every level of the family life-cycle. Our focus teams now include: Pre-engagement, Engagement, Married without Kids, Married with Infants, Married with Toddlers, Married with Pre-teens, Married with Teenagers, Married with Young Adults, Married without Kids Again, Single with Infants, Single with Toddlers, Single with Pre-teens, Single with Teenagers, Single with Young Adults, Single Again, The Unique Role of Grandparents, Marriage, God's Heart for Wives, Husband after God's Own Heart, Raising Men of God, Raising Women of God.

Each team has done a masterful job researching their topic. They make information and helpful tips available for everyone to have every week. This commitment to family development has made quite a commotion in the church community. This year we will be hosting a seminar on Family Life Ministry with H. Norman Wright as one of our guest speakers. Our Family Life

Curriculum has been circulated throughout our denomination and has been translated into 4 languages.

Family Life Groups

--Our Family Life Groups are thriving throughout the city. Every week 3-4 families come together to fellowship, take communion, talk about what they have been learning through their Scripture reading, pray, have fun, and plan ministry. Each week they come together in a home and eat together. During the meal they discuss what God has been speaking to them in their times of private devotions. This has helped provide the encouragement needed for many of them to develop the discipline of devotional life. It has been a great source of encouragement and spiritual growth for them. Every one of our Family Life Groups has prayed and sought the Lord for a ministry they can be a part of as a group. Recently one of our groups felt impressed to begin a ministry to teachers in the local elementary school. They began writing letters of encouragement and bringing by goodies. Next week they will be hosting a banquet to honor those teachers. You can only imagine how this has impacted that school and community. Many of those teachers have been asking questions of our church and we are confident they as they see the love of our Lord they will soon open their hearts to His love. Once-a-month these groups invite their neighbors to join them. Most of our growth has come as a result of these groups.

--But the greatest testimony has been that every family that has been consistently involved in one of these groups has thrived and every single marriage is strong. In 10 years, there has not been one divorce because families are standing together. They are fighting the battle for their marriage together through prayer, fellowship, and encouragement.

Church Ministry

--Wow! What a team we have. A teamwork mentality has truly permeated throughout our church. Everyone seems to be doing something *and doing it well*. 80% of our congregation has entered into a place of ministry in some way. Everyone has made it their passion to train someone else in what they do. This is particularly effective between the adults and youth. We have a motto here, "Nobody serves alone."

United Church of RSM

--It has been exciting to see the unity among churches here in RSM. Last month the RSM Ministerial Association hosted a city banquet honoring all of our city officials, law enforcement, and city services. Many of the churches in RSM came together to plan, fund, and orchestrate the event. Our city saw firsthand the love and unity among our churches and felt honored and appreciated by us. We are now busy planning the RSM Teacher Appreciation Banquet and RSM Marriage Conference. Many churches have made a purpose to come together weekly for worship and prayer.

We have had most of the area pastors teach on some occasion. Our church has really seen the value and power of being united with other churches. God's light has never shined brighter and people giving their lives to Christ daily as they see the love and unity of God's Church in action.

Missions Giving

--This year we reached our most ambitious giving goal ever: \$50,000.00. Our church has a passion for missions. Every year our goal has increased. Seeing the expansion of the gospel and blessing other congregations has quickly become a hallmark of this church.

Missions Teams

--Last summer we sent out 3 different mission teams. We sent a team to Europe, to Asia, and South America. Everyone who went was amazed at the power and grace of God. Many have said their missions experience was life changing. All of our team members returned with a renewed commitment to God and an enflamed passion for Jesus. The dynamic of our church intensifies the moment they return. Our trip to South America was particularly powerful because it was a family-friendly trip. Entire families traveled to South America to partner with a local church. During the week our women helped host a VBS for the kids that saw hundreds of kids receive Jesus. While the VBS was going, the men and youth helped to build a new sanctuary. It was powerful to see the entire family ministering together. Many families confessed that it was the greatest thing to ever happen to their family.

Church Plants

--We are having another baby. It is exciting to announce our fourth church plant in South Orange County. Our church plants have successfully carried our vision for community ministry. We have been effectively reaching our "Judea & Samaria" through multiplication. Our well-trained team of 50 will be taking up residence in their city and will hold their first service this December.

Our Relationship with Our Community

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people." Acts 2:42-47.

Our vision to reach the community is not real difficult to explain. We want to reach our community by loving each other and by loving them.

Love: The Measure of a Christ Follower

As the early church devoted themselves to growing in relationship with God and in relationship with each other, they grew in favor with their community. Luke's narrative on the state of the early church is arguably, the most revealing snapshot on the vision of the original Church, found in scripture. It displays what they were passionate about and committed to. The result of that passion and commitment is also seen here. Luke records in verse 42, of Acts 2, that, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." The church was devoted to four things: the apostles' teaching; the fellowship; the breaking of bread; and prayer. Two of those related to their relationship with God (apostles' teaching & prayer) and two related to their relationship with one another (fellowship & breaking bread). This was their vision, what they felt compelled to do. Verse 47 shows the results of this vision: the favor of the community and their numbers grew daily by people who were coming to faith in Jesus. There truly is power in relationship. Their love for God enabled them to love each other sacrificially. Their love for one another shined like a 200watt bulb in a dark room to rest of their community. Jesus said to the disciples that their love for one another will be a sign to others that they know Jesus.

Service: The Measure of Love

Just as faith without works is dead, so love without service is meaningless. Just as the fruit of a tree gives away what kind of tree it is, so the actions of a person display the genuineness of

someone's love. It would be pointless for us to say we love our community if we did not also serve them and therefore, display it by our actions. People truly do not care about what you have to say until they know how much you care for them personally. It is easy for churches, in their zeal to reach their communities, to forget this classic principal. And usually it is not for any lack of love that this happens. What can happen in some cases is a simple case of miscommunication. Often a church loves the community deeply and therefore has strong desire to see them come to know Jesus, which is by far the greatest goal of love. The problem lies not in the goal but in the method. If old adage is true, "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care.", then you must convince them of your love by meeting their immediate needs first. If what was stated earlier is true, that at the heart of every person is a desire to be loved and accepted unconditionally then all they know is that they need friendship-true, authentic, friendship. Friendship is built upon service/action. A friendship base upon lip service only, will never become authentic. However, a friendship established through service (two people giving of themselves to meet the needs of the other) will strengthen and deepen over time.

A church that wants to reach their community will learn how to serve them. Our vision for RSM is:

- We will serve them **not** expect to be served by them
- We will build up a credit by depositing love through service
- We will become a household name in RSM (known positively for our love)
- We eat, drink, sleep, and bleed RSM
- We will go to them, not ask them to come to us
- We will ask them to dinner before asking them to come to church
- We minister from the inside out
- We will live, work, and play in RSM
- We want the city to call us when they need something
- We will to keep a narrow focus on RSM while having a global vision
- We are here to serve RSM –period (we are not trying to reach Lake Forest, Mission Viejo, or Ladera Ranch)
- We will start churches in those surrounding cities/communities to reach them