

ECO SPOTLIGHT

What Does a Flourishing Church Look Like?

In recent months, chances are you've heard Pastor Steve talk about becoming an "Acts 29 church," a church walking in the early Christian footsteps described in the book of Acts: emboldened by the Holy Spirit, fueled by worship, celebrating and sharing the gift of redemption in Jesus Christ.

Being an Acts 29 church "communicates the idea that God is at work in the world and we join with him in the work he is doing," he says. "A flourishing church begins when we gather with the awesome sense of the presence of God, the sense that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. Everything else flows out of that."

ECO, whose mission is "to build flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ," focuses considerable energy and resources on creating an environment that inspires, supports and stimulates healthy, multiplying churches. Among the nine Core Values that undergird ECO's mission (eco-pres.org/who-we-are/), Missional Centrality (living out the whole Great Commission), Leadership Velocity (identifying and developing gospel-centered leaders), and Kingdom Vitality (expanding the Kingdom of God by reproducing new missional communities) together describe the hallmarks of a vibrant, flourishing congregation.

ECO also emphasizes collaboration among like-minded congregations through Presbytery

Transition Team Update

On August 29, the Transition Team (Elders Diane Chen, Meg McKinley, Emma Shaw, and Dave Bellamy) met a second time with the Administrative Commission, the team appointed by the Presbytery of Philadelphia to walk with NPC through the discernment and dismissal process.

Having spent the summer reviewing documents provided by the Transition Team, the Commission met with the full Session on September 19. The Commission will host an open meeting on October 22 at 1:00 PM for members who might have questions for them about this process. At a later time, we expect to hold an all-congregation meeting to confirm the church's wishes regarding dismissal from the PC(USA) and affiliating with ECO.

Please continue to pray for and with NPC's Transition Team, leadership, and the Administrative Commission, giving thanks for continued positive dialogue, and continuing to ask that the process would glorify God, preserve the unity of our congregation, and bless the Presbytery.

(Continued on the back)

meetings, Mission Affinity Groups and Pastoral Covenant Groups. “ECO prioritizes smaller, localized meetings over large regional gatherings, sharing best practices and checking in with each other spiritually,” says Pastor Steve. “The fact that these gatherings are mandated is a really good thing, because we are all so busy with our own congregations that we can easily find ways not to meet.”

Being mission-centered, says Elder Emma Shaw, means that part of the church’s job is “to help people figure out how God is calling them to respond, to pay attention to the ways that God is prompting people and fan into flame the sparks they already have.” This requires “a high view of the laity being unleashed, the priesthood of all believers,” adds Pastor Steve. “It puts the accent on taking the things people are already doing and like to do, and looking for ways to turn those interests outward.” One simple way to spark creative thinking about ministry, he says, is to share stories of God at work. “Testimonies of the small, everyday ways that people can make a big difference inspire us to think about how we can use own lives to bless others.”

One challenge many churches struggle with is how to be both attractional (drawing people in and assimilating them into the life of the church) and missional (habitually going out into the larger world to engage people where they already are). “I think that there is a desire to be a blessing to our community, to invite people to encounter God,” but, Emma says, being mission-centered “can feel overwhelming, especially if you already feel maxed out.”

“Part of being a flourishing church is having a contagious quality,” says Pastor Steve. Perhaps NPC’s greatest strength is hospitality, and our church has enjoyed considerable success in throwing open the doors for many and varied

occasions but, he observes, “Most people who come to our church for the first time are going through a transition or a crisis—or have a hunger of some kind—and they find our website, whereas many statistics show that 60-70% of people who come to church for the first time are invited by someone else. If we had more inviting going on, we would be positively dangerous, in a good way!”

Thinking about simple ways to increase one’s missional orientation, Emma sees a lot of potential in shared interests. “Say you are a tennis player and you have friends from church who also play tennis. You could plan to meet regularly on the tennis court to play and talk about spiritual life. You could invite other tennis players you meet there to play and talk, and then invite them to church with you. It’s a missional outreach that’s taking something you already do and seeing how God can use it to draw people to himself. You’re not doing something disconnected from the church and you’re not just expecting people to show up. You’re making it a little bit easier for them by coming to them.

“When people are energized to do something a little outside their comfort zone—and do it with Jesus—their own spiritual growth is so much greater,” she says. “Discipling people into mission [happens] not at the expense of spiritual growth but because spiritual growth comes out of taking a risk and seeing God show up.”

ECO’s main website, www.eco-pres.org, provides a helpful introduction to the denomination, as well as information about how ECO is organized, foundational documents and resources, and member congregations. Additionally, videos from ECO’s annual national gatherings can be explored at www.econationalgathering.org.

