



5-year Strategic Plan

For all this document can and will say,
let's not get lost in the wording.
Let's get to work.
Let's do something.
Let's embrace an incredible bias towards prayer and action.
Let's move boldly, fearlessly, relentlessly, quickly.
Let's be willing to fail greatly.
Let's not wait till it all makes sense
or till all the plans are in place.
Let's move. Today and every day from here forward.

We can be paralyzed by our own analysis and evaluation.
But make no mistake about it,
the people of Covenant can't afford
any inaction or paralysis on our part.

There should be an urgency
deep within us to get moving.
So let's move.
And let's help others move, too.

Executive Summary

The Covenant Church Vision 2020 is designed to serve as a strategic road map to the leadership and staff of Covenant Church through 2020. Since the church's birth, the leadership of Covenant Church has been very intentional in regularly evaluating the vision and plan for the church in order to seek out and pursue God's will for our church body. Vision 2020 represents our vision and plan for the period of 2016-2020. The next vision and strategic planning effort will formally commence in January 2019.

The core of Vision 2020 is focused on a renewed obedience and response to Jesus' exhortation to "make disciples." Our dream is that by the year 2020 our entire church body would become aligned with living out the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20. We see an ever-growing community of men, women, students, children and families who are passionately committed to a life of Biblical obedience and prayer, a body of believers desperate to reach and be in relationship with the lost in all corners of our community and world in order to bring them into a transforming relationship with Jesus Christ. We want to redefine what it means to "belong" to Covenant Church, moving everyone closer to Jesus—from passive consumers to active and passionate followers. **WE WILL BE DISCIPLES WHO MAKE DISCIPLES.**

Organized around our mission to "Invite Friends, Grow Disciples, Send Ambassadors," our specific goals over the next five years are summarized below. It is important to note that the primary strategic emphasis will be the development of disciples— for this reason, the first four goals should be understood as our first priority in the allocation of time and resources.

To be clear, we believe that God is preparing to work as never before in the life of our church. We intend to create a ***culture of discipleship*** by aligning people to a scriptural understanding of what it means to be a disciple and equipping people to live and help others live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Toward this end, our primary focus over the strategic period will be the realization of these four primary goals:

1. EXPECT PEOPLE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR DISCIPLESHIP AND FOR DISCIPLING OTHERS.
2. EQUIP PEOPLE TO ENGAGE SCRIPTURE
3. EQUIP PEOPLE TO PRAY
4. CREATE COMPREHENSIVE DISCIPLESHIP STRATEGY FOR THE CHURCH

From this effort, we will create a culture of passionate inviters and ambassadors strengthened and enabled by the realization of the following secondary goals:

5. A RENEWED EMPHASIS ON EVANGELISM
6. A NIMBLE AND RESPONSIVE CHURCH PLANTING STRATEGY
7. LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO CONNECT PEOPLE TO THE CHURCH AND ONE ANOTHER
8. A FOCUS ON GLOBAL OUTREACH
9. LEAD AND EQUIP OTHER CHURCHES AND MINISTRIES

Background

In February 2015 the Directional Team (D-team) engaged in a retreat designed to discern God's vision for our church over the next 4-5 years. Shortly thereafter, the Church Council, Pastors Advisory Team (P.A.T.) and D-team met in a 'dream session' to further discern God's call for our church. Together, these efforts yielded dozens of ideas regarding the work God had in store for Covenant Church. A small task force comprised of members of Council (Council Chair, Finance Chair, Trustees Chair and two members at-large), P.A.T. and D-team met for several months to narrow the vision and work through these many ideas. This group was also charged with communicating progress to their respective groups in order to solicit feedback and assure consensus was achieved.

Throughout the process, our first desire was to find God's perfect will for our church—the Church He wants us to become. Doing so will provide focus and strategic clarity to our efforts. Our hope is for a unified body passionately working to achieve God's dream for our church body over the next 3-5 years. From the beginning, the leadership teams and staff have been challenged to pray continuously that we would find consensus around God's call for our church. Our objective is simple: that He will receive the maximum glory.

This document is intended to provide a framework to guide our decisions and enable decisions around the allocation of time and resources over the next 3-5 years. The document begins with a brief overview of our general direction. The narrative that follows then describes our desired "to be" state for the church in each of strategic areas. That is, if God is truly being glorified, what does our church look like in each area—how are people behaving, what is happening in their hearts and lives, and what are the tangible manifestations of our progress. Specific tactical strategies are provided for each area on how we might realize that vision in each area.

Everything in this document is subject to be changed and/or abandoned under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Communication & Reporting

We believe that this strategic plan and vision must be broadly communicated to the church body in order to engage everyone in its execution and attainment. Therefore, the lay and staff leadership team commit to the following strategic planning communication calendar/plan.

- Visioning event in January—Branson casts the vision annually through sermon series
- Monthly reporting on goal progress and attainment at Church Council and leadership team (SPPRC, Finance, Seedcasters and Trustees)—all accountable to provide resources, time and their example.
- Regular prayer and leadership prayer gatherings
- Quarterly video updates at worship services.
- Annual (January/February) leadership retreat for D-team, P.A.T. and Council to review progress, pray and discern any possible adjustments

Covenant 2020

Overview

The vision of Covenant Church is to “Intentionally follow Jesus...” and our mission is to “invite friends, grow disciples and send ambassadors.” Our vision is to follow Jesus more closely daily, working intentionally to think and behave as He does. We remain convinced that to intentionally follow Jesus means we are a community of inviters, working to make disciples and send ambassadors.

A clear consensus that emerged from the process was the need to make a priority for the next 5 years of being more intentional in our discipleship efforts. Truly, Jesus’ instruction could not be clearer than when he instructs us to “make disciples” (Matthew 28:19-20). Our belief is that God has placed a stirring in the hearts of our leadership that this mandate would serve as our central vision and strategic priority in the coming years. It is important to note that a discipleship focus does not diminish the importance of inviting friends and sending ambassadors. Instead, the making of disciples of Jesus will have as its inevitable consequence passionate inviters and people called/sent in His name into all the world. For this reason, we begin with our vision and strategies for more intentionally growing disciples

WE WILL MAKE DISCIPLES

The church we are now:

Today, there are many self-proclaimed disciples within our ranks. However, the majority of Covenant members and attenders is not actively engaged in a discipleship relationship (i.e., discipling someone or being disciplined by someone). If we believe that God’s Word is authoritative and thus to be submitted to and obeyed and not merely known, then we must face the reality that if our self-proclaimed disciples are not actively making disciples as Jesus commanded in Matt 28:18-20, then we are quite possibly not disciples at all. If disciples are to make disciples and we’re not doing that, then we must re-evaluate our own commitment to follow Christ.

Granted, the causes for this disparity are varied. Some are simply ignorant of this expectation because we have inadequately taught and modeled this for them. Some are stuck and/or feel inadequate and unqualified or unable to lead themselves much less someone else. Some are willing but are hesitant because they lack confidence as to *how* they are to do that with someone else. Some are simply unwilling to do so, relegating the responsibility to the church staff and leaders.

Therefore, we know that we must improve in this area, but we are not alone. The recent study by the Willow Creek Association called *Reveal*¹ discovered that even at a church famous for evangelism and small groups like Willow Creek Community Church, growing disciples is hard and an inexact science. For the history of Covenant Church, we have had some success in growing up believers. There is clear

evidence of spiritual growth and pockets of success at developing mature believers, but we all desire to do better.

The church God wants us to become:

Therefore, moving forward, we will be a church that fulfills Jesus' instruction to *make disciples*. This means there is an understood expectation among attenders and members that Covenant is about making disciples and that we have a culture where discipleship is the clear mandate. Discipleship means teaching people to obey all that Jesus commanded with the goal of equipping other disciples to obey all that he commanded and lead lives guided by His Word. People will be equipped to experience continuous growth and progress in following Christ more closely and are expected to multiply that understanding and passion for Christ-filled living by sharing it with others.

There will be an ever-increasing number of Christ followers who understand their true role as a disciple of Jesus and are consistent in pursuing their personal walk with Christ, the greatest evidence of which, as recorded in Matthew 22:36-40 and Luke 10:27-28, is an ever-increasing love for God with all that we are **and** an ever-increasing love for others. These two evidences cannot and must not be separated as the intangible fruits of our growth as disciples of Jesus.

We believe that growing people change – it should be impossible to follow Jesus for any length of time and not change both internally and externally– in thought, motive, attitude, word and deed. While God is graciously patient with us, disciples of Jesus are constantly confronted with the areas of our lives that do not reflect the heart and character of God which He longs to develop within us. Disciples of Jesus grow, not for the sake of growth nor for the sake of increased knowledge, but for the sake of loving God with all that we are **and** loving our neighbors as ourselves.

The men and women of Covenant will be passionate about introducing people to Jesus and mentoring them. We will celebrate growth we witness in people's lives—stories will be told and the work God is doing inside of discipleship relationships will be celebrated and glory will be given to God. Church leaders will model their obedience to Jesus' command to make disciples of others. Our heroes will be those who are equipping others to lead lives based more fully on God's Word and sharing the love of Christ with others.

Strategic Initiatives to close gaps

To create this future, we will transform the Covenant culture to a new shared understanding of what a disciple is and does. For our members and attenders, this will mean taking personal responsibility for taking their next step as disciples of Jesus and directly engaging others to help them take their own next step. For our staff and leadership, this means creating a context and ministry/service opportunities that empower and equip people to truly be responsible for the fulfillment of the Great Commission by making disciples.

Specific goals associated with this culture transformation include:

1. EXPECT PEOPLE TO TAKE PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR DISCIPLESHIP

We will develop a strategy to restore our equipping DNA to release people to accept responsibility for creating ministries, relationships and programs that contribute directly to the creation of more disciples.

Specific tactical strategies include:

- Training and development for key equipping staff to support their efforts.
- Develop an incubator for ministries—i.e., find experienced leaders willing to disciple others in the creation of their own ministries—instill Covenant DNA, secure necessary resources, communicate, etc.

Objective owner(s): Branson, Jeff, Jay, Covenant Church Leadership

Timeline/target: 2016-2017

Key performance indicators:

- Number of discipleship relationships
- New ministry starts
- # of ministries that are lay administered.
- Percent of leaders (all teams) who are actively in a discipleship relationship.

2. EQUIP PEOPLE TO ENGAGE SCRIPTURE

Focus on equipping people to properly engage scripture (view the Word as authoritative and learn how to engage it with a strong bias towards obedience and application). A disciple's life and decisions are guided by Biblical teaching. A disciple understands how to study God's word and to help others to study God's Word and trust it as the ultimate authority for our lives. It is worth noting that this strategic direction is made more critical by the belief that we are inside a critical juncture for society and our own denomination. It is likely that over this strategic period covered by this document that we will be faced with critical decisions related to the future of our church and denomination. We must work to be confident and resolute in our understanding of God's truth so that every decision would be made out of obedience to His inspired Word.

Therefore, *we will* first engage in an extended and comprehensive effort to teach others how to view, study and obey God's Word, including:

- A comprehensive teaching emphasis, communication plan and continual reinforcement regarding the priority of submission to God's authority as revealed in His Word (i.e. should be undertaken with as much or more zeal, commitment, and "push" as we did Financial Peace University a few years ago).
- The development and implementation of church-wide opportunities focused on improving people's understanding of the Bible and how to study it, etc.

- Leadership (Staff, Council, PAT and leadership team) will be expected to go first—must be in a group or discipleship relationship focused on growing in our ability to study and understand God’s word.
- Group leaders with flexibility in curriculum will be encouraged to elect studies focused on equipping members to study God’s word more effectively.

Objective owner(s): Branson Sheets, Jeff Daigle, Jay Buckingham, Covenant Church Leadership

Timeline/target: 2016-2017

Key performance indicators:

- Number of discipleship relationships
- Percent of leaders (all teams) who are actively in a discipleship relationship.

3. EQUIP PEOPLE TO PRAY

A disciple is in constant communication with God in seeking His direction and guidance in every area of his/her life.

Therefore, we will engage in an extended and comprehensive effort to teach others the absolute importance of prayer and to pray and seek God’s voice in all they do, how to talk to God and be alert to the movement and call of the Holy Spirit. This will include:

- The development and implementation of church-wide programs focused on improving people’s understanding of how to pray and communicate with God.
- A comprehensive communication plan regarding the priority of submission to God’s authority as revealed in His Word.
- Leadership will be expected to go first—must be in a group or discipleship relationship focused on growing in our ability to talk and listen to God more effectively.
- Group leaders with flexibility in curriculum will be encouraged to elect studies focused on equipping members to communicate with God more effectively.

Objective owner(s): D-team, PAT, Covenant Church Leadership.

Timeline/target: 2017-2018

Key performance indicators:

- Prayer warriors- number
- Leadership prayer events

4. CREATE A COMPREHENSIVE DISCIPLESHIP PLAN FOR COVENANT CHURCH

A disciple is constantly growing closer to Jesus -- experiencing a truly victorious life, falling more in love with Jesus and others and becoming bolder in their witness and sharing the gospel. For this reason, a critical need within the church is the development of systems and programs to help people understand their “next step” as a disciple.

We will develop, communicate and implement a comprehensive discipleship program in which people are able to identify their next step as a disciple of Jesus. Program should offer discrete definable steps that believers can take their “next steps” to become fully devoted followers of Jesus.

Objective owner(s): Jay Buckingham, Jeff Daigle, Kenny Jenkins, PAT, Covenant Leadership Team

Timeline/target: 2017 (in place)

Key performance indicators:

- Comprehensive program in place
- Number of participants
- Stories of “next steps”
- Number of people serving in ministry

INVITING FRIENDS AND SENDING AMBASSADORS

By transitioning the culture to redefine our collective understanding of what a disciple is and creating a context in which people accept responsibility for becoming and helping other become disciples, we will inevitably become a church of passionate inviters and ambassadors.

The church we are now:

In terms of inviting, the best and most effective evangelism strategy has been inviting people we know to a worship service, small groups, and other events at Covenant, and making guests feel very welcome. Many of the current members of our church came to be associated with Covenant Church in this manner and ultimately, many came to a saving relationship with Christ because they first stepped through our doors with someone they knew. Building on this foundation, there are opportunities to improve and recommit to this critical value.

In terms of sending, the church has enjoyed watching the incredible fruit that our prayers, gifts and effort on the 40 acre campus in the Dominican Republic. Covenant Church, however, is currently at a crossroads and Seed Casters is currently discerning Vision 2020 for outreach. It is apparent that the strategy employed over the last 5-7 years of “going deep” in one area has proven limiting. Therefore,

teams are continuing to pray about new places to do ministry, how to support missionaries in the field, new ways to invest with ministry partners, and how to send more people on “effective short term mission experiences.” It is also evident that the worldview of many people in our church is very limited. Many of our people do not have any idea of what God is doing outside of the borders of our experience in eastern North Carolina. We have little knowledge of what God is doing globally. Our people are often surprised to hear that the Church around the world is growing by leaps and bounds. We are surprised by the move of the spirit in supernatural signs among many Christians in other places besides the US. We are also ignorant of the power of the gospel to penetrate other cultures and religions in places foreign to our experiences.

The church God wants us to become:

We will be a church of passionate inviters. Our members will overflow with passion, a passion to share the Gospel beyond the pulpit—we will be a growing army of believers who are inviting others into a relationship with us, and ultimately, Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. We will expand what it means to invite others and develop a culture of not only inviting people to church, but into our homes and lives so that we can walk alongside them. Our lobby will be a place where people are welcomed, connections are formed and people make the visitor their first priority. Disciples will take personal responsibility for people they meet to ensure connections are made, follow-up occurs and they are brought into our body of believers to begin/continue their own journey as a disciple. Further, the double campus launch of 2014/2015 demonstrated that our church could reach new people and establish new campuses where worship/ministry could be duplicated to mirror what takes place on the Winterville campus. Not only was there great excitement but also great momentum from these launches as many new people have become a part of the church because of them. Therefore, we will be open to the call of God to expand our reach in the form of campus plants. We will be prepared to deploy quickly and nimbly in response to God’s call.

We will be a church who sends disciples to every corner of the earth. We will drive a global perspective in which Covenant sends disciples everywhere-- Ethiopia, Lebanon, DR, across their streets, and into the workplace. Further, the renewed emphasis on our Ephesians 4:12/equipping culture expressed in Goal #1-- i.e. to create a culture in which people are required to be responsible for their and others growth as a disciple, will result in ministry births and opportunities to serve in Jesus name that we can now only imagine.

Covenant is one of the leading churches in our conference and denomination. We will respond to this responsibility by leading by example and teaching others the lessons that God has taught us about being effective.

Strategic Initiatives to close gaps

1. A RENEWED EMPHASIS ON EVANGELISM

We will work intentionally to drive and support a culture of evangelism and inviting.

Our strategies will include:

- A Turbo Group strategy for starting small groups
- An updated Connections strategy for welcoming newcomers which includes greeters/ushers/servants of all ages (especially students and young adults)
- A comprehensive plan to make Covenant Kids a front door for families and increase the numbers proportionately at all campuses
- Marketing strategies to bring awareness to new campuses especially since they are portable sites
- A possible Hispanic Campus
- International Ministry
- Expand the reach of our online campus

2. A NIMBLE AND RESPONSIVE CHURCH PLANTING STRATEGY

We will develop and implement a plan for church planting that combines faithful evangelism with faithful stewardship of global resources.

Specifically, we will:

- Employ a connectional model and plant new campuses about every 2 or 3 years
- Develop and communicate a resourcing plan to assure new staff and resources are in place to be effective in our mission while not putting undo financial stress on the Winterville Campus.
- Plan for the next campus to be launched with a campus pastor in mid-2016 with a physical launch by 2017

For existing church plants, our goals are as follows:

- The Covenant ECU campus will continue to increase in number of newly engaged committed converts to the faith. Financially Covenant ECU will not be expected to be self-supporting. It is viewed as a missional work.
- The Covenant Washington campus will be self-supporting by the end of 2017
- Hold membership (ownership) classes on each satellite campus to mirror what the Winterville Campus does with the “next steps” class so that new people can catch the vision of Covenant.

3. LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY TO CONNECT PEOPLE TO THE CHURCH AND ONE ANOTHER

Specific strategies:

- Replace our current database system (Shelby) with a system that is much more conducive to a multi-site church strategy. The new system will need to:

- Handle all things from children ministry check in to contributions to downloadable information into staff mobile devices.

4. A FOCUS ON GLOBAL OUTREACH

The goal for the next 3-5 years will be to increase the number of people who participate in global outreach 10 fold. The development of disciples at Covenant Church with a truly Global Christian Worldview.

Specific strategies include:

- The development of several different kinds of mission trips including a transformation trip designed for disciple-formation rather than a task to complete.
- The emphasis on prayer to discern God's next steps for His people to be in unity together with His vision.
- Working with other agencies to bring us face to face with topics like human need, global evangelization, persecution of believers, support of indigenous church planting, etc.
- New Covenant Magazine

5. WE WILL LEAD AND EQUIP OTHER CHURCHES AND MINISTRIES

We will become a clear leader in championing Biblical authority within our denomination and society and work to equip other churches to do ministry.

Specific tactics we will employ:

- Active involvement and leadership within the denomination.
- The development of training events in the areas of worship, global leadership and discipleship.

Key Strategic Questions for Leadership over strategic period:

What is our debt management strategy? (Finance to develop and present)

- A team to develop a strategic plan to pay off our indebtedness.
- Develop a plan to payoff off the existing debt on the Winterville Campus by 2020. Our current debt is \$2.9M, and at our current payoff rate, we will have a balloon payment balance of approximately \$1.2M in September 2020.

What is our new master site plan for Winterville campus?

- Develop a workable, comprehensive campus plan for the Winterville/Central campus that will allow maximum growth into the future.
- What is our best strategy for the main office space and other houses long term? (Trustees to develop and present).

- What is the long-term plan for Covenant Preschool and Kindergarten?
 - What are the growth factors for Covenant Kids, Covenant Students and Worship? (Melissa & Bob to develop and present)
 - What about production issues and what space is needed to grow this ministry? (Branson, Mike & Jeff to develop and present)
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Footnotes:

¹ Hawkins, Greg and Parkinson, Callie. "REVEAL: Where are You?" *Willow Creek Association*. 16 Dec 2015. <http://www.willowcreek.com/ProdInfo.asp?invtid=PR35413>