



We are mobilizing the Next Generation of World Changers in Nicaragua! Read all about it inside!

Faith MATTERS

Reputation & Identity

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Reputation & Identity

By **Dion Garrett** | Senior Pastor

Last month I completed my thirteenth year as a pastor. Who says 13 is unlucky? It was a great year for me personally and especially our church! As I reflect on my relatively short tenure in ministry, I'm struck by how much the world has changed in that time. We're living in an era where more and more people are saying, "No thank you" to church. Their past experiences with church have left them wanting, sometimes even wounded. It seems that in America, churches have become the biggest obstacle to people finding a relationship with Jesus, which is an irony of ironies since we, the Church, are called his *Body*.

As a pastor, I know this. I encounter it all the time. People are hungry for greater meaning. They seek mystery in their lives, and they are curious about Jesus and the things that might be unseen. But many of them no longer see the Church as a place to experience that. As I heard in one of our focus groups of unchurched people in West County last summer, "I would like church to be more interactive with the soul, not what I'm supposed to mumble at the time. I detest that ... it doesn't have meaning to anybody."

Through our research – both of what's going on in the Church in America, and of what unchurched people in our community are saying – we've discovered that St. John breaks the mold in so many ways. In our focus groups, we spent time asking participants to describe their ideal church, the kind of church they would be interested in attending if it existed.



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Here are the things they envisioned:

- Inclusive, welcoming and accepting
- No judgment
- Accepting of all backgrounds/ non-denominational
- Feel connected to others in the church
- Not too large, not a mega-church
- Brings the community together
- Committed to helping local community
- Messages are personally relevant
- Grounded in the Bible, yet meaningful for today
- A balance of traditional and modern
- Relaxed and casual, not stuffy or rigid
- Programs to engage children and teens

As you read through the list, doesn't that sound *exactly* like us? They were describing us as their *ideal church!* I was so encouraged by that, I hope you are too! But here's the frustrating part: We discovered that few unchurched people know we exist! Even when we told them that we *do* exist, they were skeptical. Standing in their way is all the baggage from previous church experiences, general cultural attitudes toward Christianity, and closer to home, our perceived *brand* (If the word *brand* makes you uncomfortable, it's only a shortcut for bigger concepts like reputation, identity, and personality). What we discovered is that even after explaining our true personality to these focus groups, their perceptions of us – based on things like the size of our campus ("hard to navigate"), our name ("sounds Catholic"), and our look ("seems like an office building or doctor's office") – made them doubt our claims. In short, who we are at our core is not clear and accessible to seekers out in our community. Or to put it another way: **We have the real thing to offer, but our community has no idea.**

For the last year, I've been wrestling, praying, and conversing about what to do about all this. Finally, through some wise counsel and a constant burden (thanks to the Holy Spirit) I found a path to help us move forward in light of these revelations. In addition to talking with our Board of Directors and Elders, I formed a "Brand Advisory Team."

The vision behind the Brand Advisory Team is to get a diverse group of our own St. John people together to wrestle with all that I've been wrestling with and to see where God leads us. I intentionally invited people from a variety of backgrounds, age cohorts, tenures at St. John, and a good mix of gender. I'm grateful to the following individuals for being so open to talking, exploring, sharing, and praying about our church's brand in our community:

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| Trish Alexandre | Adam Kurkiewicz |
| Stacie Brasseur | Ashley Mendez |
| Allison Brune | Brian Olivio (elder) |
| Amy Calzada | Sharon Schaller |
| Rick Fessler | Annmarie Wallis |
| David Jameson (staff) | Ray Ward |
| Mindy Jeffries (board) | Neal Weber (board) |
| Karl Kamrud | Carol Wyatt (staff) |

I've already met twice with our Brand Advisory Team (lively group!), and as we move forward, they will be having lots of conversations with people. In fact, maybe you've been part of such a conversation already. If not, feel free to seek these people out! They are excited to share what we've been working on and get your perspective on how we can better help people find Jesus here.

One thing I *know*, the entire basis for my call into ministry 13 years ago is that I want people to see God as he *really* is, not who the world and even well-meaning Christians have made him. Here's what I firmly believe: If we can first help people understand who *we really* are as a local church, they'll without a doubt meet Jesus here.

Meet the Brand Team



Trish Alexandre

Years at St. John: Around 20
Volunteer roles: Women's Bible Study leader, Altar Guild, and my true love—anything to do with College Hill and Bryan Hill school.
Professional background: My entire career was in the fashion retail industry purchasing clothing domestically and abroad.



Stacie Brasseur

Years at St. John: 16
Volunteer roles: Music Ministry: Worship Leading, St. John Productions and Vacation Bible School.
Professional background: Account Executive for Estée Lauder Cosmetics.



Allison Brune

Years at St. John: 21
Volunteer roles: Children's ministry and MOPS Steering, drama ministry, Life Group Leader.
Professional background: Mom.



Amy Calzada

Years at St. John: 6
Volunteer roles: Life Group leader, Special Needs Leadership Team, MOPs coordinator.
Professional background: 2 years full-time staff with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Math Teacher.



Rick Fessler

Years at St. John: 7
Volunteer roles: Branding Team.
Professional background: Business Owner



David Jameson

Years at St. John: 2.5 at St. John, 1 on staff
Professional background: Community Engagement Director



Karl Kamrud

Years at St. John: 11
Volunteer roles: First Impressions, Oasis mentor 2011-2013, Iron Man small group leader.
Professional background: Edward Jones for last 16 years



VBS Thrives Because Students Serve

By **Sam Hensel** | *Next Generation Intern*

As Summer comes to a close, we celebrate a successful season in children's and student ministry. Vacation Bible School brought over 800 children onto our campus in June to learn at Maker Fun Factory that they are built by God and made for a purpose. Not only did preschoolers through 5th grade learn this, over 500 volunteers were also reminded of God's love. Of those volunteers, 330 served as crew leaders during the week. Crew leaders ranged in age from 13-18. Each crew leader was responsible for three to six kids in their crew, leading their group around campus for worship, Bible story, and games!

Weeks after VBS passed, I heard many people thank our adult volunteers for their service during that week. I agree that without their efforts, VBS could not have happened. But even more so, we could not have held a safe and impactful VBS without the 330 students who serve as Crew Leaders.

Sam Mickel was just one of the hundreds of student leaders who served. Sam has attended VBS for 12 years now, serving five of those as a crew leader.

I asked Sam, "What's the best thing about being a crew leader?" to which he replied "Hanging out with the kids by far!"

As fun as it was, being a crew leader comes with difficulties. Sam explained that the hardest part was dealing with challenging kids in the group. What has Sam learned about dealing with challenging kids? "Set boundaries and negotiate with them." Sam says. He continued, "Even with the challenges, I keep coming back each year for the kids. Seeing the kids happy, makes me happy." Sam feels that he has become more connected to St. John throughout his years at VBS and is honored to serve and tell the next generation about the good news of Jesus!

After each morning of VBS, Sam attended ExtremVBS. EVBS is for incoming sixth grade through high school students to have an afternoon of connecting with friends and having fun after serving at VBS in the morning. After being fed lunch, the students are spilt up into their grade levels and adventure out to places across the St. Louis area. Some activities included an afternoon at the City Museum, Upper Limits, Aquaport, paintballing, and many more! Sam says that Extreme VBS is different from any other camp he has attended because

everyone is so nice and he has never met a mean person there. "It's so easy to make new friends. Plus they (St John) take you to awesome places!"

With 330 crew leaders, it is almost impossible to oversee them all. To help delegate the role of Crew Leader Director, the role of Crew Leader Coach was put into place. Six upper classmen in high school or college students are selected to guide and assist the crew leaders of each grade. One of the Crew leader coaches this year was Jaime Spechinger.

Jaime will be a junior this fall at Marquette High School, and she has spent the past 5 years of VBS serving as a crew leader. I had the opportunity to talk to Jaime after VBS and I got to ask her a little more about how her week went and what she thought of her new role. When asked why she agreed to the job she replied, "Seeing other people do it (be a coach) seemed fun and it was something new to try." Jaime did miss forming those close personal relationships with each child in the crew, but she got to know the other crew leaders and gained responsibility working with them.

Jaime was the Crew Leader Coach over the preschool and kindergarten Crew Leaders and dealt with everything from tantrums and potty accidents to finding misplaced children. Jaime said that the biggest stressor for her was "Crying kids!" Jaime saw plenty of those and had to bring peace to the stressed child and the stressed crew leader. She felt she really succeeded in helping everyone follow their schedule and getting kids where they were supposed to be. In the end, the stress and chaos was worth it for Jaime. She saw kids who had never been to ANY church before that were learning about Jesus. A parent even approached Jaime and asked her for more information about the preschool program offered at St. John by a family. When I asked if she would do it again next year she responded, "Definitely!"

Sam and Jaime are two examples of the tremendous leaders we have in student ministry. As we raise the next generation of world changers, it is crucial to give them opportunities to grow in faith, responsibility, and service. We are excited to see Sam and Jaime (and hundreds more!) back next year at VBS 2018 Shipwrecked and Rescued by Jesus, June 18-22.



the SUMMIT

By **Pua Coffman** | Associate Director of Student Ministry

BIG NEWS

We are THRILLED to announce the launch of *The Summit*, a worship experience on Sunday evenings designed specifically for High School students. Here's what a student can expect on a typical night:

After being welcomed in the lobby, students will be directed to the newly-renovated third floor of Cornerstone. After connecting with friends and mentors for a few minutes, students will play team games, sing with a student-led band, and hear a message that challenges and encourages them. After the message, students will split up into mentor-led small groups based on age and gender to discuss the teaching.

Why is this such a big deal?

This has been a long time coming. Over the last 3 years, student ministry directors and volunteers have been praying, laboring, and journeying towards a vibrant and growing high school ministry. Three years ago, we were a church that did a lot of things really well, but student ministry was not thriving. We made the decision to scrap all 'official' high school gatherings and focus on getting to know students individually. (Because why would students want to come to a youth gathering where no one knew their name? or knew about their life?) We began visiting schools, learning the names of high schoolers serving in children's ministry, and planning smaller get-to-know-you events so our staff and key volunteers could meet the amazing high school students already at St John.

After 1.5 years of meeting with students outside the church walls and supporting them at games, recitals, and shows, we put First and Third in place. For the last 1.5 years, First and Third allowed students to gather in a large group twice a month on campus for a chance to worship and hear a message that addressed their specific life phase.

How is this different than First and Third?

First and Third allowed us to continue to develop relationships with students until we had the capacity to run a weekly gathering for them, but it was never meant to be our permanent high school structure. We believe students grow best with a weekly touchpoint with an adult mentor who knows them and loves them. The Summit will give students that weekly touchpoint, and so much more! Having a weekly meeting allows momentum to grow, and it makes it easier for students to invite their friends to attend as well.

Please pray for us.

High school students across West County are searching for their identity and purpose. They are searching for the best life possible, but they don't know that they will find their best life and their identity in Jesus! We are passionate about sharing this truth with students. Please pray that The Summit will communicate God's love to teens from all over West County. Pray that 75 students come to the launch. Pray that God directs all our preparations and receives all the glory for all things related to The Summit.

**Launch August 27
4:30-6:00 pm**

Meeting dates at
stjstl.net/students



Adam Kurkiewicz

Years at St. John: 5
Volunteer roles: Information Station
Professional background: Investment Director at Washington University in St. Louis



Ashley Mendez

Years at St. John: 3
Volunteer roles: Nursery
Professional background: Director of Sales and Marketing at TOC Artwork



Brian Olivio

Years at St. John: 18
Volunteer roles: IronMen small group leader for 10 plus years, CORE leader, Elder
Professional background: Sales/Key Account Manager at Ambassador Floor Co.



Sharon Schaller

Years at St. John: 28
Volunteer roles: Sunday School Teacher, High school girls mentor, Women's ministry leader
Professional background: Retail Manager (8 years), Office Manager (12 years), Administrative Manager (12 years)



Annmarie Wallis

Years at St. John: 21
Volunteer roles: Communion Team, MC
Professional background: Brand Marketing Supervisor at Lutheran Senior Services



Ray Ward

Years at St. John: 18
Volunteer roles: Board of Directors, Communion Host, Ironmen. Various committees at St. John
Professional background: 42 years Strategic Marketing and Branding counsel



Neal Weber

Years at St. John: 15
Volunteer roles: Usher/Greeter, Local Missions, Board of Directors
Professional background: Marketing/Advertising - Creative Director



Carol Wyatt

Years at St. John: 14
Volunteer roles: Choir, Choir leader, Worship Volunteer, Drama Ministry Leader, Board of Directors
Professional background: Self-employed for 20 years; Communications & Facilities director at St. John for 8 years

*Not listed - **Mindy Jeffries**

TRANSFORMATION NICARAGUA

By **David Jameson** | *Community Engagement Director*

Despite how difficult it may be, I am going to do my best to adequately describe the incredible experience that was had in Nicaragua this past May. However, I won't be doing it alone. A few of the college students that went on the trip will help me tell this story, and I believe their personal testimonies will do an excellent job portraying the life change that took place on this trip.

In order to have the proper lens through which to hear these words, you must understand the organization we partnered with for this mission trip. It was our first time partnering with Amigos for Christ, and it certainly won't be our last. This organization works shoulder-to-shoulder with Nicaraguan neighbors to bring clean water, healthcare, education, and economic opportunity to rural communities in need. They have a staff of roughly 150 people, and the vast majority of them are Nicaraguan. Not only that, but while we were on this trip, the Amigos for Christ staff led devotions and worship that felt incredibly similar to St. John worship, and that allowed us to connect with our Father. They kept their focus on building intentional relationships with each other, with the incredible people of Nicaragua, and with our Savior. As the person responsible for mission work at St. John, I could not be more encouraged and optimistic about the future of this partnership!

Connor, one of the students on the trip, describes what it was like on the Amigos for Christ compound, which is deep in the heart of Chinandega:

"The first day we were there, I just tried to get a feel for what it would be like living on the Amigos for Christ property, or the prop as the staff members called it. Dormitories, offices, and the cafeteria surrounded the best part of the prop, El Rancho. El Rancho was a beautiful wooden structure with what appeared to be palm leaves forming the roof. Here all the volunteers played games, sang songs, did devotionals, and got to know one another. It is very fitting that the center of the prop was a space dedicated to hanging out and forming relationships. Later in the morning, we learned that we would all be doing a chore each day, which definitely got me excited, but it was cool to see how when we were living there it was almost like one big family."

Kaitlyn, another college student, explains the type of work that we did while we were there and what it felt like to take part in that work:

"The people of Nicaragua are such welcoming and loving individuals. The whole trip felt as if it was one big family working together to help the citizens of the towns. The children were so excited to see

everyone working on their school! They LOVED being able to interact and play soccer, baseball, tag, and much more with us. There was no language barrier! It was amazing to see the love of God being spread and the drive behind all the hard work. We were able to lay concrete for future classrooms and for walls to expand on schools that were overflowing with children. Having a school that was over flowing with children may sound like a problem, but it was honestly a blessing to the town! They had so many children that had the opportunity to go to school that they needed more space! This is something unheard of in a third world country. Seeing the children's faces made the hard labor easier. I was physically able to see the impact my hard work was having on the community."

Lauren summarizes the trip and does a great job of capturing the feelings and experiences that were had by the group as a whole:

"You discover a lot about yourself when you travel, but this trip was different. In Nicaragua I built relationships with the Amigos for Christ group and with God. I never knew you could become so connected with people in just a week. We all encouraged each other and stepped up to help one another. I also saw what God was doing to Nicaragua. If just the joy in the children and families wasn't enough, He was creating a future for everyone in the communities. What I hope to learn from this experience is that just the simple act of building relationships is just as good as building a school. We affected the lives of the Nicaraguans and they changed us. I hope that I can build relationships at home the same way I built relationships in Nicaragua."

The work happening in Nicaragua is unparalleled. Amigos for Christ is empowering the people to take ownership and helping them to have clean water, schooling for everyone, increased quality of life, and a renewed sense of hope. But that's not all. Amigos' mission statement is simply to "make Christ more visible", and they are certainly doing that. The St. John team can attest to this, myself included. I encountered God in Nicaragua in deep and personal ways, and I'm closer to Him because of this trip.

Our church will be taking a group of college kids back to Nicaragua next year, and I encourage you to tell any college kids you know about this trip. Not only that, but in 2019 we will be sending a larger group so that anyone can go. I cannot wait for more people at St. John to experience the transformation that is happening in Nicaragua, but until then, let's keep this new partner and the people of Nicaragua in our prayers. Thank you all for your support, and I look forward to the future!

SUMMER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

By **Chris Toomey** | *LIFEjourney Director*

George Barna recently completed a study and concluded, "I believe that in America today, fewer and fewer people will embrace the spiritual dynamics of the church unless the church can raise up strong servant leaders." Leadership training is at the core of the Biblical method for expanding the influence of the church in our culture. Both the Old and New Testaments focus on training and multiplying leaders who will change the world...the best example being how Jesus intentionally invested in the disciples. St. John believes it is our responsibility to do the same.

So, we began a Summer Internship Program (for college students) last summer. The program was designed to be an exciting, intense, and unique ministry opportunity with hands-on-training in practical areas of ministry. Through one-on-one mentorship, weekly leadership training sessions, book studies, and daily interaction and involvement with our staff, our interns are given an invaluable and transformative experience. We want students to be awakened to the God-given potential inside of them to make an impact for God using whatever gifts God has placed inside of them.

On May 23, we welcomed our 2017 interns with the goal of helping them develop character, calling, and competency as they participate in the mission of St. John. We identified a vision and strategy that encompasses the following values:

We value TRANSFORMATION...

We want to see God form Christ's character in our interns through the Holy Spirit, in the context of community and service. It's the transformation of the whole person in thoughts, behaviors, and methods of relating with God and others. It results in life change!

We value LEARNING...

One of the greatest gifts of this internship is the opportunity to learn. God wants us to learn from Him. We value learning together because God values learning together.

We value DISCOVERY...

This internship is not about interns clarifying a call to a "formal ministry post" at the conclusion of the experience. It is about understanding more of themselves, deepening their relationship with God, and utilizing their gifts/passions SO THAT they can discover clarity and delight in the journey God has them on.

We value CONNECTION and COMMUNITY...

Primarily, for them (our interns) and God. Secondly, with our staff, the internship cohort, their specific ministry team, their mentor, and their developing relationships with the volunteers and people our staff get to serve.

With leadership comes responsibility. We believe it is our responsibility engage, empower, and mobilize the next generation of Christian leaders and world changers. But, not only is it a responsibility, it is an incredible privilege!

