



Faith
MATTERS



G R E A T E R T H I N G S

P A S T • P R E S E N T • F U T U R E

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GREATER THINGS

PAST • PRESENT • FUTURE

by STEPHEN HOWER



IT IS AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK.

Looking back on 30 years of ministry to recall, analyze, and explain what God has accomplished during my tenure as a pastor of St. John is an impossible task.

In all honesty I am more fully aware of my faults, my failures, and my inadequacies as pastor than my achievements. It is embarrassing to be honored as the key to any of St. John's accomplishments. If credit is to be given it belongs to the Lord, to the staff, to the long-suffering Lay Leaders who encouraged me and our congregation to accomplish great acts of faith, and especially to THE PEOPLE OF ST. JOHN who sacrificed, endured, and persisted through it all to become what God has fashioned. I owe you all my sincerest appreciation. And to my faithful wife Carol, and to our sons Joshua and Jacob, the congregation and I both owe a substantial debt of gratitude and compassion for all they endured for the mission and ministry God accomplished through us.

I entitled this article "Greater Things," because Jesus told his own sinful and incompetent disciples, "Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do **even greater things than these**, because I am going to the

Father." His term, "Whoever believes in me..." covers us all. God chooses the weak to shame the strong, and those who are nothing to shame those who think they are something. I'm living proof of that truth.

Greater things are still ahead. Two-and-a-half years ago I stepped back from the Senior Pastor position and the congregation called Pastor Garrett to lead us. I'm often asked if I have any regrets about that decision. No I don't. In fact, I have never been more confident of any decision in my ministry than the decision to encourage that change. Pastor Garrett has become one of the finest pastoral leaders and teachers I have had the privilege to observe in my entire professional ministry. The fact that he is our pastor, leading our congregation with his humble spirit and considerable talents is an incredible blessing to St. John and to me. He is my brother, my friend, and my pastor.

Most of our current attendees were not present when I was called to be the Senior Pastor in 1988. Things were a bit desperate in those days. St. John had been without a senior pastor for some time, and had called several highly qualified men who all declined their offer. I was working at our denominational headquarters in Kirkwood. My administrative assistant's daughter was graduating from St. John's school that Spring and their graduation speaker had cancelled at the last minute. I stepped in to help out. I don't recall my speech but they weren't expecting much so it all worked out. Much to my surprise, and without so much as a phone call, I was then asked to accept the job of Senior pastor. Can you say, "Desperate?"

It seemed a bit bizarre to me. The only thing St. John knew about me was from my official denominational bio, and I knew nothing about St. John. It was time for us to meet. I brought along my call documents and returned them for reconsideration. I had been a pastor for ten years, some of that time as a denominational leader which provided exposure to a wide variety of ministries. I knew what kind of a pastor I wanted to be and what kind I was unwilling to become.

I remember at the meeting I learned the congregation and school were both doing well. They had finished the year with a financial surplus and the worship services they conducted in their beautiful but smaller brick church were full. I was of the opinion they really wanted a pastor who would simply maintain the status quo. I wasn't that kind of pastor. I remember saying for the first of many times that night, "The church is not the mission. It is established by God to accomplish the mission. The mission is lost people." They were completely unaware of my unconventional ways, so I returned their offer and stated I would only consider the position if we could mutually agree upon a few conditions. I felt life was too short to engage in mutual frustration.

- St. John must begin offering a non-liturgical thematic service which non-members and members could experience equally on Sunday mornings. (It could not be relegated to only Saturday night).
- We would immediately begin plans to construct a larger church..
- We would plan and conduct activities that would effectively welcome all people of West County to our campus. We would not focus our ministry solely on our members.

Within the week, the congregation agreed to support my expectations, asking only for patience as we moved together towards a new and potentially exciting future. In all candor, after three short years the congregation was in an uproar over all the changes including dispensing with clerical garb, and other long-honored traditions. It confirmed my suspicion

that everyone wants a strong pastor until they get one. Once again I brought my call documents to the voters to provide them the opportunity to rescind their decision. I wasn't angry. I just didn't want to waste my time or theirs with constant turmoil. I remember leaving the meeting so the leaders could have a candid "family discussion." And again, the voters asked for patience but agreed to move forward down a path towards what has become a Biblically conservative but nontraditional ministry.

The transition from my former role as Senior Pastor, to Associate pastor, to fully retired pastor will be coming to a blessed conclusion in February 2018. I have been engaged by Lutheran Hour Ministries to connect with and encourage their partners across the country. With the addition of Pastor Mauss, the need for my help at St. John has greatly diminished according to plan.

St. John staff is planning a formal congregational celebration and farewell for us on the weekend of February 10 and 11; after which time I will move to Pastor Emeritus status and no longer be an active member of the pastoral teaching staff. Carol and I are not planning on moving away. This is our home, our church, and our city. I remain available to help our congregation as any other active member and to the degree my schedule allows. Please join me in giving God the glory for all He has done and continues to do. I am especially grateful to the Lord and all of you for the many times you have overlooked and pardoned my faults and failures. It is the nature of a gracious God and people who honor His values.



Pardon Our DUST

by **DION GARRETT** *Senior Pastor*

If you've been in our Sanctuary at all over the last two months, chances are you've left brushing off your clothes in the parking lot... There's dust everywhere! And this winter it's spreading to the Commons and Nursery areas. In the meantime, our Brand Advisory Team and staff leaders have been hard at work, wrestling with last year's research of how we're perceived in our community and constructing a new *brand platform* to better communicate who we are; also messy work! In this very issue of Faith Matters, you'll find news about our ongoing leadership transition, a transition which has created its own kind of dust (be sure to read Pastor Stephen Hower's article!) I wouldn't call it "messy" because God has been too good, Pastor Hower too humble, and the people of St. John too gracious, but it sure has been significant! Finally, in the last year you've joined me in Pursuing People **like Never Before**, Taking our Campus **to the Next Level**, and Mobilizing **the Next Generation** of World Changers, words that speak of a church and a mission that is perpetually moving forward, always "under construction."

Over the last several years, there's been a lot of driving, changing, adapting, stretching, sacrificing, some apologizing, a few pleas for grace, and a whole lot of dust.

Which has driven some to ask, "Is all this necessary?" Or worse, "What's so wrong with us that all of this is necessary?"

As Stephen Hower reminds me, "Change is a constant." And the moment we stop changing, stretching, and taking next steps, that's when we die. But I want to address the, "What's wrong with us?" question. My answer? Absolutely **NOTHING!**

As I've led these processes that have required us to look deeply at who we are, I've come away so affirmed by what I

see! I see St. John as a church who takes seriously the call of Jesus and is actively striving to live it out. I see a church that matches, with shocking clarity, the lofty picture unchurched people painted (through focus group sessions) for what their "ideal church" would look like. I see a church that I'm proud to be a part of, a church that is enriching my life and the lives of my family. I see a church that is a great blessing to our community and region, who actively and willingly partners with others who are seeking to do good. All said, I see a church that is in its sweet spot, advancing God's reign and rule of love and mercy in powerful ways.

So why all the change? The pressing forward?

Why all the dust??!!

Because as beautiful as we are, who we are *at our core* is not being clearly seen by those outside of our community. All that is good, noble, and right isn't immediately obvious, it's being lost in translation and we can do better! We are working to change that!

Starting back over two years ago, we started asking you, the people of St. John, about the obstacles that get in the way of you inviting more unchurched friends to join you. Then we talked to our community in the aforementioned focus groups and let them see and hear a little bit about us. They liked a lot of what they heard but were confused by some other pieces that seemed like mixed messages.

Anecdotally we've heard from newcomers and Getting Started attendees about their first experiences at St. John...the things that were great and the things that were confusing or even unintentionally off-putting. I've also probed into dozens of personal testimonies about the



common obstacles people have learned to overcome whenever they invite a friend to church. Through all of that listening and understanding, we have set out to remove obstacles and clarify confusing impressions that we're giving out through parts of our NEXT two-year vision and our work on branding, not because there's anything wrong with who we are but because who we are is wonderful (not perfect but still wonderful), scriptural, life-giving, and we can do better to ensure we're being more clearly seen and known by our neighbors.

Work in our Sanctuary is on the verge of completion and I believe it's a wonderful step toward representing ourselves better. Sometime before next spring, depending on how God blesses you financially and how freely you decide to share it with your church, we will begin work on our Commons and Nursery spaces to make those places warm, inviting, newcomer-friendly environments that more fully express what's at the heart of our faith community.

In our branding work, we will continue exploring how we better communicate the uniqueness of all God is doing *here* at this church, a faith-community as unique as any. We will strive to harness the gift of sharper, more descriptive language to help people see who we are and what God does here. We will partner with you to help remove the obstacles that make it difficult for you to invite someone to church, because this is a great church, filled with great people, who are being made alive by a Great God!

All of our "dust" is a commitment to stop at nothing until the heart of this church—and more important, the heart of God—can be clearly seen by as many as possible.

Thank you for what YOU do to make us the beautiful church we are.





the **SUMMIT**
TWENTY SEVENTEEN

by **JON SHEPHERD** *Associate Director of Student Ministry*

The date was August 27, 2017...(and you're thinking, "Wait, that's how you start a story about something that has historical significance"). Exactly! Something of historical significance happened at STJ two months ago! We launched The Summit—a dedicated space and weekly experience created specifically with high school students in mind. The empty and uninspiring 3rd floor of Cornerstone was transformed into a beautiful and inviting oasis for our students.

Our expectations were blown away at the Summit launch. Let me paint the picture...

As students walk in for the first time, the excitement is almost tangible. You can hear dozens of conversations all at once. Students mingle throughout the room, catch up with friends and grab a snack from the trail mix bar. Music is playing and the soft lighting creates the feeling of the outdoors at dusk. There is a mountainscape prominent on the front wall with raw wood accents all around. The smell of evergreen is present in the air. As the large group time begins, we quickly realize that the 60 chairs will not seat the 71 students and 15 mentors that are present. But, students and mentors don't seem bothered by it – they grab bean bags, drag over several couches, and some just contently find a place to stand. Students shout for their team during the game; then as the newly formed Summit band leads in worship, high schoolers sing, lift their hands, and engage in worship like never before. The message is simple and it explains the reason for the three banners hanging that read, "Belong. Behold. Become." (The Summit is a place where students will belong to a loving community; it is a place where students behold Jesus and deepen their relationship with him; and, it is a place that helps students become who God has uniquely made them to be). After a time of prayer and response, the evening concludes with more opportunity for students and mentors to connect and build community. No doubt, it was a night to remember! But, the launch was only the beginning. Since that night, the Summit has continued to be a safe and reenergizing place for high schoolers to connect with God and others. We have new

students consistently being invited and the small group relationships are beginning to deepen. We are excited about the number of high school students who are engaged and growing in their faith. One of our adult mentors who has mentored her group of girls since 2nd grade commented, "I am so excited about the Summit. For years we have done such a great job of caring for kids in Children's ministry and more recently for 6th–8th graders in CORE. The Summit continues that intentional, high quality, hands-on investment in the next generation. In an age when more and more young people are skeptical or even antagonistic about Jesus, Summit is a place where we wrestle with truth, are encouraged in faith and experience personally God's love for us. My girls say things like 'I love that we are not afraid to talk about real life here' and 'this is a place where I know I belong'."

We are humbled by God's blessing and leadership over this ministry and we believe that He has much more is in store!

SUMMIT FUN FACTS

Since the launch, The Summit has averaged
42 STUDENTS EACH WEEK.

There are **11 adult mentors** who are leading small groups of students; 5 of the 11 have been with their students since 6th grade; 1 mentor has been with her group since 2nd grade!

Music is led by our newly created Summit band, which is made up of **high school students only.**

St. John School continues to bless families by providing an environment that fosters faith development, excellent academics, and a strong sense of community. As these values drive our mission, it is exciting and encouraging to witness and listen to families share how St. John School is making an impact. It is why families choose STJ School. As a result, we are excited to share a few stories below:



"Our family has been blessed to be a part of St. John School for 8 years. We enrolled our oldest daughter, Maddy, at 2 years old. We now have 3 children at St. John (plus one at home)- representing Early Childhood, Elementary and Middle School and we've been so happy with each phase of their education! St. John excels in developing a child's entire character. Beyond an excellent academic education, we are witnessing our children grow in their Christian faith, and learn what it means to be compassionate leaders in their community. They are learning to mentor younger students, serve others, lead prayer, and memorize scripture: tools that will shape them throughout their entire lives.

We love that St. John is partnering with us as parents to reinforce the values we try to instill at home. It's a huge comfort to know that they are learning from teachers who exemplify Christ's love on a daily basis. We've been so impressed by all teachers and staff, at each grade level, throughout our entire St. John experience. We are thrilled to be a part of this unique environment, balancing hands-on academics with the spiritual development that we feel is essential in our children's lives."

Schlautman Family

"Connor has attended STJ since he was 3 years old. From the preschool teachers, to the current Middle School teachers, all have been instrumental in Connor's educational journey. Happy kids start with happy adults. It is apparent that the St. John staff loves what they do and want the best for all children. All of the teachers at STJ really try to learn and understand our child as if he was their own.

Another reason is because of the community that helps us raise him. We have become very good friends with many families that raise their children the same way we are raising Connor. We know anytime he is with a St. John family, he is in good hands with those parents. Their morals, values and spiritual leadership are exactly what we want our child surrounded by.

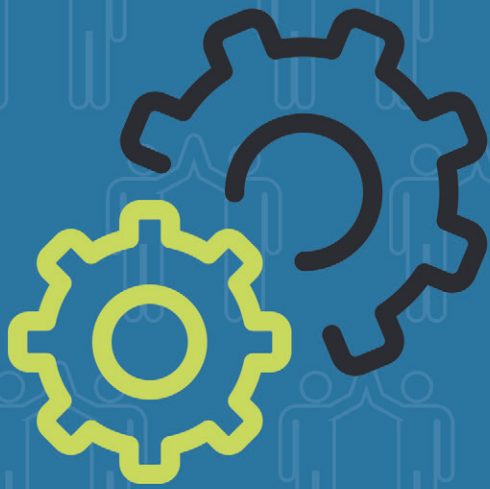
One of the most obvious reasons we send Connor to St. John is because of the teaching/learning of the Lutheran Faith. We know Connor will continually grow in God's faith and have a solid foundation of our Lord when he moves on to High School. He is a typical sixth grade boy but has learned how to make decisions with God in mind and to let God guide him through tough decisions.

Finally, the up-to-date technology and curriculum have proven to be successful and are researched-based. Connor has been most successful when the teachers use best practices and tap into his strengths. The staff at St. John allows Connor to be who he is and not be influenced and formed by a society lacking Jesus. WE CAN'T THANK THE STAFF ENOUGH FOR LOVING OUR CHILD!" **Terbrock Family**



We remain committed to providing an outstanding Christian environment for families. As a result, I am inspired by these stories and the many similar versions that are shared from our St. John community. I pray that these stories are also encouraging as you consider the many ways St. John impacts the next generation. I continue to ask that you pray for our school ministry and for the teachers and leaders who serve. If you, or someone you know is interested in experiencing St. John School, please schedule a tour or join us for our next open house on November 16 at 7pm. We would enjoy the opportunity to share how our core values drive education and impact families.

by **SCOTT OSBOURN** Principal, St. John School



St. John holds a unique place in the community as we serve as a church, full-day school and a major gathering place for events. Our doors are open and our lights are on more often than not. Take a look at the parking lot as you drive by on Manchester Road. There's usually a fairly good number of cars parked on it no matter the day or the time. From volunteers gathering for training, rehearsing or putting on an event, our campus is busy! While we have staff that help with all of the activities, we simply can't do it without you.

Have you ever wondered,
"How many volunteers does it take?"
You have questions. We have answers!

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED WEEK OVER WEEK

SUNDAY MORNINGS

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

84

NURSERY 11
PRESCHOOL 18
K-5TH 40

LARGE GROUP 10
SPECIAL NEEDS 5

STUDENT MINISTRY

56

CORE 30
THE SUMMIT 11

STUDENT BANDS 12
STUDENT TECH 3

HOSPITALITY

82

COFFEEHOUSE 1 ALTAR TEAM 4
INFO STATION 1 COMMUNION SERVERS 45
PARKING 4
FRONTLINE TEAM 28

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED PER EVENT

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

VBS 669

EGGSTRAVAGANZA 87

FAMILY CHRISTMAS EVE 45

FAMILY FORWARD EVENT 40

STUDENT MINISTRY

NEW YEARS EVE PARTY 12

EXTREME VBS 14

SUMMER SESSIONS BLOWOUT 14

FALL RETREAT 21

CARE GROUPS

LAVISTE VISITORS 15

CARE GROUP LEADERS 16

FINANCE/FACILITIES

COUNTERS 4

FACILITIES/MAINTENANCE 2

FINANCIAL MAILINGS 5

LANDSCAPING 12

LIFE GROUPS

ADVENT BY CANDLELIGHT 42

BRO•BQ 35

LIFE GROUP LEADERS 52

WOMEN'S FALL EVENT 14

OKTOBROFEST 35

WOMEN'S SPRING EVENT 15

MISSIONS

BRYAN HILL FAMILY FUN DAY 45

SCHOOL SUPPLY SHOP 50

BRYAN HILL THANKSGIVING 100

WORSHIP

BAND & LEADERS 11

PRODUCTION TEAM 10

Want to get involved?

Check out stjstl.net/servestj for all the ways you can help.





by **JEFF COOK** CFO/Director of Operations

We are nearly one year into *NEXT*, our two-year vision for the life of our church. Through *NEXT* we are Pursuing People Like Never Before, Mobilizing the Next Generation of World Changers, and Taking Our Campus to the Next Level. Through your financial support, your time and effort, and most importantly God's favor, much has already been accomplished. Here are just a few examples:

- **Since last December, an average of 312 individual devices connect via LiveStream each week to participate in our worship services. Many more view and share our services with friends through our website at other times during the week. This medium has become a unique and impactful way for St. John to reach across our region and our country.**
- **The Summit, a brand new weekly experience for our high school students, kicked off with 71 students and 15 adult mentors in attendance. The Summit gives students the opportunity to build friendships and engage with God through student-led worship, teaching that challenges and encourages them, and mentor-led small group discussion and application.**
- **Important renovations in our Sanctuary are leading to a more cohesive and technologically integrated worship environment. The installation of a new sound system has led to a drastic improvement in sound quality and control, and new motorized shades over the east and west stained glass windows are allowing them to be seen once again.**

In the coming weeks you will hear about so much more as we celebrate the past year and look forward to what lies ahead during the second year of our *NEXT* initiative. It is an exciting time to be part of St. John as we look forward to what God is going to do in and through our church in the coming year.



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Nov. 29 | Dec. 1 | Dec. 2 | Dec. 3



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