

How will 2023 be a missional year for you?

Hopefully by now you have heard the phrase “every member a missionary” or you’ve seen the hashtag #everymemberamissionary, and you’re asking yourself, “How can I be a faithful missionary?” If you’re not asking that question, I want to invite you to do so.

The elders and I, along with the church staff, are convinced and convicted that the Great Commission given to disciples by Jesus was an enduring command until His return. In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus told His disciples to go into all the nations, making disciples of them, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded. Jesus said He would be with us until the end of the age. That’s enduring. That’s still Jesus’ commission to His disciples.

We believe the command to teach disciples to obey everything Jesus commanded includes His command to make disciples. This means part of the discipleship process is teaching people how to make more disciples. Or as I would say, how to live missionally. I believe every follower of Christ has a place in Jesus’ mission; some more vocal, some more forward, but all essential. And everyone should be prepared to “*make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.*” This, Peter says in 1 Peter 3:15, is how you “*honor Christ the Lord as holy in your hearts.*”

The essence of discipleship is not the acquisition of knowledge, but rather the humble application of that knowledge in service to God and people. Thus, our discipleship strategy at Wildwood Church is not simply, nor primarily, the transfer of information. Rather it is the transformation of hearts which leads people to share their faith with others. You might hear us speak about this using the phrase “send and equip.” This is *how* we’ll complete our mission.

We equip people through discipleship here at the church in sermons, bible studies, and worship services, and in connect groups, triads, and at conferences and retreats. We do this because the bible teaches this is necessary for disciples to grow into maturity. (Check out Ephesians 4:11-16) But the end state is not equipped saints congratulating one another on their superior knowledge of theological matters. Nor is it even that we would pride ourselves on our piety and morality. Knowledge and piety are wonderful and essential to the Christian life. We are called to know and love the Lord and to be holy as He is holy.

But it for this reason that we *go* into the world with the gospel, living lives of obedience to the One we love. If the essence of my discipleship is being equipped so that I *know* more, I am failing to fully obey the Lord’s commands. Thus, we *equip* the saints, we make disciples, in order to *send* them out into their own spheres of influence to live circumspect lives with a conspicuous joy, and to seek and take opportunities to share the hope of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with whomever the Lord allows. After all, Paul asks in Romans 10:14-15, “*How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”*”

This is the essence of discipleship and the essence of the mission strategy of Wildwood Church. We believe this is how every church should function, to be honest. This is basic discipleship – send and equip. It’s got a ring to it doesn’t it? It makes sense, right? I hope so because we’re not inventing anything new. We’re just taking Jesus at His Word.

So, I return to my initial question: How will 2023 be a missional year for you? How will you engage in the mission of Jesus (and of Wildwood Church) this year? Let me share a few ideas for you to consider as you ring in the New Year:

1. Short-term mission trips – This year we offer three locations and four dates for you to take the leap of faith by hopping on a plane to take the gospel “around the world.” Choose from Galveston, Haiti, or Kenya. Choose summer or fall. Pray and see if the Lord would have you join us this year. If not this year, don’t worry...this is just the beginning!
2. Live in disciple-making community –We believe the most life transformation happens in the context of smaller groups. The smaller the group, the more the impact. It’s in the context of smaller groups that you get down to real life issues. Are you in a Connect Group and triad? If not, ask Pastor Matt to get you plugged into a Connect Group and see if a triad (discipleship in a 1 on 2 relationship) emerges from that. Or let Pastor Matt know you’re interested in the next triad that becomes available. Additionally, attending Sunday morning Adult Bible Fellowships and Wednesday evening bible studies not only help you grow in the faith and understand the Word, but it also serves to help you begin to build discipling relationships. Consider one of the three ABF options currently offered and one of the Wednesday evening studies that will begin on January 4th.
3. Join Wildwood Church in membership – We believe every born-again Christian is a member of the universal body and therefore ought to find their place as a member in the local body. There’s only so much a person can do while maintaining a loose commitment to a church as attenders. We invite you to jump in and make a commitment to the people around you to know and be known, to serve and be served, to love and be loved. The process we use to help you learn about us and us about you is called Partner with Wildwood. It helps you determine whether this is the church the Lord would have you join and it helps us understand where you are in your walk with Christ and where you may be gifted to serve. Shameless plug, most ministries could use more volunteers...have you considered where the Lord would have you serve within Wildwood?
4. Go all in for Jesus – Realize that wherever you are is where the Lord has sent you! Paul said in Galatians 2:20, *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* We should all aspire to this mindset! Wherever you are, in whatever circles you find yourself, whatever the circumstances, you can know that Jesus has a purpose for you and it’s possible He has you there to tell someone the Good News that Jesus saves sinners! It will be awesome if you sign up for a mission trip and take the Gospel around the world, but I encourage you to be willing to take it “across the street,” too!

I would regret not taking this opportunity to share the Good News with you right now. The bible tells us that every single person has a sin problem, the consequence of which is death and separation from our God. But God in His infinite mercy and because He loved us, sent Jesus to die for us to pay the due penalty of our sin and offer us the free gift of eternal life in His righteousness. There is nothing you can do to earn eternal life and no amount of good deeds will come close to making you right with God. But God is willing to make you right with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. He is willing to forgive you and cleanse you of all unrighteousness. You need only to recognize your helpless condition and call out to Jesus for salvation and forgiveness of sins. Then heed His call, “Follow me!”

If you have done this for the first time just now, I would like to hear from you! Email me @ bsmith@wildwoodchurch.com In the meantime, take this Gospel *across the street and around the world* because #everymemberamissionary!

Blessings to you,

Pastor Brian