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*“Our Vision & Strategy”*

*MATTHEW 28:18-20*

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*EAST MOLINE, ILLINOIS*

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## AT A GLANCE

Where is Wildwood heading and how will we get there? We believe the Lord is leading us toward a pretty exciting future and the Bible lays out how we are to work toward that vision! Watch this sermon to hear about our vision and strategy!

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last two weeks I've spoken about the mission of Wildwood Church and I made the assertion that the Great Commission is the mission of every church for all of time. And since the church is made up of individual disciples of Christ, it is really the mission of every Christian.

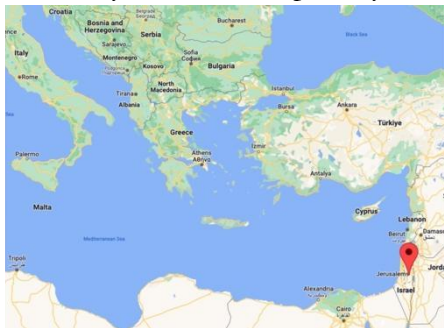
But wasn't the Great Commission given to the apostles? Is it really for the church today? Let's review the Great Commission once again.

**And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:18-20**

## TO THE END OF THE EARTH

What do we see in the Great Commission? We see Jesus commanding His disciples to make disciples of all nations and teaching them to obey everything He commanded them...to the end of the age. All nations...to the end of the age. How far did the apostles take the Gospel? All of them died about 1900 years ago. Let's see how far they went while they were alive.

This first slide is the general area where the Apostle Paul took the Gospel. For one man, that's absolutely incredible, especially 2000 years ago! I read he travelled 10,000 miles.



But the earth is a big place. Let's zoom out a little. Assuming the Ethiopian eunuch that Philip baptized in Acts 8 went back to Ethiopia, the Gospel went back there with him.



But that represents a very small portion of the earth. Zoom out again.



Jesus said to His disciples in Acts 1:8, *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

Bear witness about Jesus to the end of the earth. Jesus’ intent is that the Gospel makes it all over the world. I hope you see my point. The apostles took the Gospel far and wide, but didn’t even come close to getting to the “end of the earth.” If they had, the end would have already come. *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Matthew 24:14*

That word nations is ethne and it means people group, not just country. Pastor Andy shared with me that it is not completely known how many people groups remain unreached, as much as 7000 consisting of 3 billion people, and as few as 144.

That you and I are still awaiting the return of Christ and the final judgment of the world indicates that the gospel is still being proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to all ethne. And it’s not the apostles doing it.

### WHOSE JOB IS IT NOW?

So, who does carry the Gospel to the nations today if the original apostles haven’t? Let’s go back to the first church and see how they understood the mission and intent of Jesus.

When Peter and John were released after being threatened by the religious council in Jerusalem, Luke records that they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. Their friends, who made up the first church, prayed, *“And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. Acts 4:29-31*

Who was filled with the Holy Spirit? They were all filled with the Holy Spirit. It means they were emboldened by the Holy Spirit. And what did it cause them to do? The adjective “all” modifies not only “were filled with the Holy Spirit” but also what comes next. They continued to speak the Word of God with boldness. They were all emboldened by the Spirit and they all continued to speak the word that got Peter and John threatened. They spoke the Gospel.

Years later Peter would write to the church, *“but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being 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.” 1 Peter 3:15*

Always be prepared to share your hope. Christian, what is your hope? Is it not the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Is your hope not Christ in you? This is what we mean when we say, “Every member a missionary.” That as every member of Wildwood Church goes across the street and around the world, you are always ready to give a defense of the hope that is in you. You are always ready to articulate the Gospel and give other people the same hope you have.

## OUR VISION

Having been convicted to do more than simply preach that people should go into all the nations, we have set a goal of raising up 50 long-term, global missionaries from our own body and to ultimately support an additional 150. That’s what we believe the Lord would have for Wildwood.

We believe the Lord wants us to pursue this vision. Raise up 50 of our own cross-cultural missionaries, support another 150 in the mission field, and see that every member is a missionary, taking the Gospel across the street and around the world. That’s the vision. It’s a picture of a faithful future. This is where we believe the Lord wants us to go.

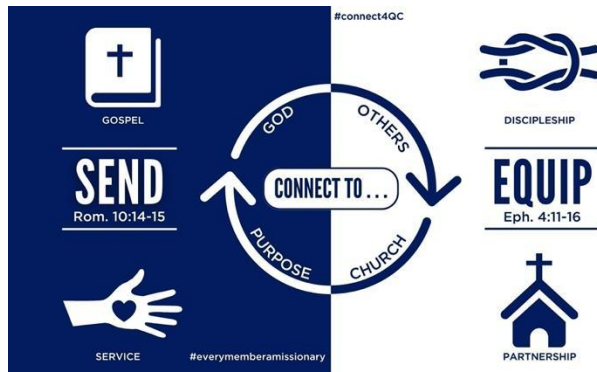
## OUR STRATEGY

How will we get there? How will we achieve this vision and the mission of Jesus for His church? The Bible identifies the how. We don’t have to get clever and invent something new. Let’s look to Jesus. What did He do? He equipped his disciples and then sent them out to make more disciples who they equipped and sent out. On and on until it got to you and me. Nothing has changed in the last 2000 years. Jesus set up his church to equip and send. So that’s what we intend to do.

We will, by God’s grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, achieve our part of the mission by doing two things: equipping the saints and sending them out. We’ll make disciples who make disciples. Notice the cyclical nature of this strategy.

## EQUIP THE SAINTS

Equip is what we do within. The church gathers to be equipped. If you look at our mission priorities, you’ll note that our discipleship priority and our partnership priority serve as equipping efforts. These are all the efforts we put into helping you grow in the faith, virtue, knowledge, obedience, and in belonging.



Equipping is what leaders are called to do as shepherds of the flock of God. *“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry...”* Ephesians 4:11-12 Notice that the role of church leaders is not to do the work of ministry, but to equip the saints to do the work of ministry. This isn’t an excuse for leaders to be lazy. It’s an invitation to experience something amazing.

When leaders and members get this right, the result is astonishing. Look verses 13-14, *“...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”* Ephesians 4:13-14

The church becomes a unified group of people who know Jesus, are growing in spiritual maturity, and are not easily deceived by false doctrine. Talk about a solid church! It’s not wishy-washy. It’s not stale. It’s not cold. And it’s not dead; it’s growing!

*“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”* Ephesians 4:15-16

We equip the saints to do the work of ministry because an equipped church is a church that is growing in unity, maturity, faithfulness, and fruitfulness. An equipped church is a church that is working properly. An equipped church is an impactful church.

We equip our people through various discipleship activities. From sermons to Adult Bible Fellowships to Connect Groups to Triads to men’s and women’s bible studies, retreats, and conferences, we equip our people to do the work of ministry so that we will be a growing and maturing body of believers.

We equip the saints. But we don’t equip just to make you smarter about Jesus. We equip you so you can be sent out on mission as faithful disciples of Jesus! We equip the saints to do the work of ministry. Church leaders’ primary responsibility is equipping the saints to work for Jesus. Which is why we say that we are equipped in order to be sent.

## UNLESS THEY ARE SENT?

Where do we get this idea? Well, beyond the Great Commission in which Jesus told His disciples to “Go,” and Acts 1:8 where He told them they would “bear witness” to the ends of the earth, we glean this implied task from *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!’”*

If equip is all about investing in believers, send is all about reaching unbelievers, both within the walls of the church and outside the church.

If you consider our mission priorities, you'll note that connecting people to their purpose through service and connecting people to God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ are send efforts. Every effort we make to reach lost people, both corporately in an organized way like short-term mission trips, or *Light the Night* on Halloween, and *Vacation Bible eXperience*, and ministry in our Youth and Children's Ministries, every outreach effort we make as a church, plus every effort we make in individual ways like inviting our unbelieving neighbor over for dinner, and giving invite cards to people we meet in public, or buying groceries for the man in front of you when his card is declined, are all send efforts.

This is connecting you to purpose through service in order for you to connect people to God through the gospel of Jesus Christ. And it's not like we create every opportunity for you. We organize some of these send efforts, but our most impactful send effort is reminding you that you've got a purpose in life and that purpose is living for the glory of God by being the light in the darkness. By encouraging you every time we have the opportunity to live on mission.

This is what we mean when we say this is "send" effort. You and I are sent to reach lost people by serving them and giving them the Gospel. You're disciplined to make disciples. You're equipped to be sent.

Will you wrestle with this and recognize that you're being invested in to be mobilized and not just to be invested in? You're being equipped in order to be sent. And you're being sent to "seek and to save the lost" as Jesus' disciples taking the only message that has power to save the lost – the Gospel.

We send people out with servant hearts, connecting them to the purpose God has for them in service, so that they can connect people to God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We equip disciples and send them to make more disciples. That's how we do what we're called to do in the Great Commission and how we're going to get where we believe God is leading.

You might ask yourself, "Does this really reflect with the heart of Christ?" I mean most churches I know aren't that serious about reaching lost people and making disciples of them and sending them back out. Is this really the heart of Jesus?

Let me conclude with a parable from our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and let Him reveal His heart to you. Turn to Luke 14:16-24.

"That my house may be filled."

*"Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." Revelation 19:9*

It is our blessed task and highest honor to go to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in that His house may be filled.

Every member a missionary, taking the Gospel across the street and around the world. That's our vision. Equipping the saints and sending them out is how we'll see it.