



April 16th, 2020

The Marathon Strategy for Greenbelt Church

As a church leadership team (elders, deacons & staff) we have done a ton of amazing work to prepare us for 2020. Everyone was incredibly excited for the year ahead! Who would have thought back in January this would have included what we are currently experiencing in this worldwide pandemic of COVID-19.

A number of decisions and ministry initiatives were rolled out in order to meet the requirements of physical distancing and keep people safe. What was originally thought to be a short sprint for a few weeks, is now actually a long marathon before the church.

Thankfully, Greenbelt has already begun a number of those key conversations and ministry restructuring that allows us to continue our mission of leading people in knowing, living and sharing Jesus! Our core values, our mission and our vision remain the same. What needs to be examined is how our ministry strategy and methods need to shift around this new normal of physical distancing for the foreseen future.

This document is a first draft to start the conversation around the ministry shifts that need to take place for a marathon approach of physical distancing. It makes one big assumption: **that Sunday morning gatherings will not take place until much later in the year, if at all in 2020.** Professional sports, festivals and concerts are having those conversations as well! If that changes and we can gather sooner, praise God. If not, and this is the long haul, it would be wiser for us as leaders to be prepared and ready for the task at hand.

A Network of Home Churches:

As leaders, we should begin to see Greenbelt as a network of home churches, gathered around our common values, mission and vision.

Over the past few years, we have done amazing work strengthening our LifeGroup ministry. From congregational care, prayer and Bible studies, our LifeGroups have grown to be a crucial ministry of our church. As we continue Greenbelt Online for the larger gatherings, the LifeGroups will become even more important in the life of the church.

When physical distancing measures begin to diminish in the next few months, this will allow the LifeGroups to meet again. This will be the primary way that people will feel connected to the church, as it will be the way to actually meet physically with other members of the church. This connectivity keep people more together than any online worship service could do.

These groups should be seen more as home churches living out the mission and vision of Greenbelt. This may be a big shift in the view of the church for a few people. Even though Christians know theologically that church is not a building, we still tend to view the crucial and important ministry as what happens when people come into our building.

Having a house church view of our LifeGroups reminds us that the church is truly the people.

Here is a list of shifts that this approach of being a network of home churches will bring.

1. **Greenbelt Online becomes the central starting point for people to connect with our church family.** The worship and the preaching on Greenbelt Online is centered around keeping the groups aligned around our core values, mission and vision. It also serves as a safe way for people to check us out and begin taking steps to connect with us.
2. **Shift from teaching to equipping.** Teaching is important, and still has its place. However, we need to increase the equipping of people to engage with the Bible, practice spiritual disciplines, and live out God's mission in their own life. We need to help people move from simply consuming teaching content to engaging a personal, spiritual journey to follow and become more like Jesus.
3. **Much more attention to the care and development of leaders.** Our need for volunteer leaders will be even more crucial to provide long term health of our LifeGroups and other key areas of ministry. It will be increasingly easy to burn out while in isolation and while only being connected with a smaller group.
4. **Shift from attending to engaging.** While we have been improving on this front over the past couple of years, we will need to strengthen how we get people into LifeGroups and how we help them engage with Jesus' mission. It is already being reported that 2 out of 3 churches in North America have seen their online attendance DOUBLE their Sunday morning attendance before the isolation. This is great, but is not the goal. Attending church online isn't the goal, becoming like Jesus is.
5. **A shift in the usage of our building.** When LifeGroups are able to start meeting, it is possible that some people may not be comfortable attending in people's homes. The church building can be set up to host groups in a larger space, ideal for smaller groups of people keeping appropriate distance from each other. The sanctuary would continue to serve as a studio to prepare content to equip the church.

6. **Sunday Connection Teams become Online Connection Teams.** In order to allow the entire body of the church to use their gifts and talents, we need to shift the Connection teams to help connect and bless people online.
7. **Stronger focus on local outreach.** As isolation is prolonged, our local community needs to feel the love and impact of the local church. We must prepare more to meet local physical and spiritual needs.