

Our Vision

Adopted by the congregation January 9, 2005.



Introductory Note

The congregation of Jesus MCC first adopted a Vision Statement in December, 1997. Since then we have reviewed, updated, and unani- mously reaffirmed our Vision Statement twice. The most recent update occurred in January, 2005.

Vision Statement

Our vision is to become one of the world's foremost discipling GLBT congregations, then to share that model of ministry with others, ultimately affecting the course of the global GLBT Christian movement.

The term “disciplining” means: (a) bringing people to faith in Jesus Christ; and then (b) equipping them to follow him consistently and effectively in daily life. Doing this requires a holistic approach that includes Christian education, practical life support, and opportu- nities for service. In particular, in our congre- gation we feel called to emphasize two key areas of service: doing justice and helping those in need.

We want to build a Christian community that enables us to live the motto, “What would Jesus do?” We want to cultivate faith that is action oriented. We want to provide training and support that will root and ground people so deeply they can survive spiritually for the

long haul, even through times of crisis. We then want to share this model with GLBT Christian Communities worldwide.

Why Is Discipling Our Emphasis?

We emphasize discipleship because that was the focus of Jesus' ministry. He gathered a dedicated and diverse group of spiritual seek- ers, invested enormous energy teaching them how a person of faith lives, then sent them out to share with others. At the conclusion of his ministry, Jesus last request was that we “go into all the world and make disciples of all people.” *Matthew 28:19*. As lives are trans- formed one person at a time, the world is changed, coming a little closer to what God intends. The Lord's prayer sums it up well, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” *Matthew 6:10*.

Implementing Our Vision Within Our Church

To achieve our vision, we believe we must build a church that is characterized by the following:

- **Clarity of Purpose.** We must not shrink from presenting the high demands of the Gospel.
 - **High Quality Biblical Teaching.** We need many high-impact sermons and other spiritual training opportunities, including our Discipleship Training Track.
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- **Meaningful Ministry Opportunities.** We must encourage each congregant to discern and use his or her spiritual gifts in ways that make a powerful difference in the world.
 - **Practical Support.** We must provide practical support to help congregants grow their life skills (e.g., parenting, relationships, finance, health maintenance, etc.), so as to minimize instability and to help sustain people when crises do occur.
 - **Friendship Networks.** We must systematically encourage strong bonds of friendship.
 - **Effective Outreach.** We must get word out, letting all aspects of the GLBT Community know we are here, including people of color and transgendered people, and create a welcoming environment to receive them.

The foregoing has significant implications for how we conduct the most visible aspect of our work at JMCC, *i.e.*, our worship services. To achieve our discipleship mission, we must:

- Realize that our worship services are the primary intake mechanism for the church, and the primary recurring event that anchors our members spiritually and connects them to us long-term.
- Therefore, the service must be done well enough to get the attention of and motivate congregants.
- To achieve our discipleship mission, the service and sermon must have high information content, with a relatively greater emphasis on practical teaching than ceremony or ritual.

Our sense of calling also has significant implications for how we invest our ministry resources. We do not see ourselves as an island unto ourselves. We do not wish to circle the wagons and look inward. We believe we have an obligation to change society.

Reaching Beyond Ourselves: Doing Justice and Helping the Needy

We feel called to focus on creating change in two critical areas. First, we are called to a prophetic voice advocating justice for the GLBT Community and others. Throughout history, the people of God have consistently advocated justice for oppressed peoples. *Exodus 3 and 4; Isaiah 59:1-16; Psalm 82:3-4; and Proverbs 21:3.* As the prophet Amos said, our “solemn assemblies” of worship will ring hollow in God’s ears if not coupled with a fierce struggle for “justice [that] runs down like the waters and righteousness [that runs down] like a mighty steam.” *Amos 5:21-24.* As Christians who live among an oppressed people, we have a special obligation to sound the cry for justice. We are in a position to play the same vital role in advocating justice for our people in the name of God as the historic black Churches have played in the struggle for equal rights for African Americans.

Second, we are called to help those in greatest poverty or distress here in Indiana and across the globe. The teachings of Jesus are full of exhortations to his followers to give priority to helping those facing great distress. *Matthew 19:16-26; Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 14:12-14; and Luke 19:1-10.* To authentically reflect the love of God as a congregation, we must reach beyond ourselves and beyond the causes in which we have a self-interest to care for hurting people, including people who belong to classes that oppress us. *Matthew 5:38-48.*

Given the foregoing, as we grow as a congregation, we must continue to grow our effectiveness at advocating justice and helping those in need. This is not optional; it is imperative – integral to who we are. We must continue to refine and enhance the work we are doing on the justice front through our Justice Ministry and the Interfaith Coalition on Nondiscrimi-

nation (ICON). One of our key goals is to help ICON grow into an enormously effective statewide organization. ICON is a coalition of churches and religious organizations founded by Jesus MCC. Its purpose is to bring together affirming people of faith to educate spiritual, civic, and political leaders and the general public about the need for equal rights for GLBT people. As a religious organization, ICON can speak effectively to the single greatest obstacle to equality for GLBT people in Indiana – religious prejudice.

To help those in need, we must continue to refine and enhance our work with the Christian Children’s Fund and AIDS Walk, as well as our Homeless Ministry and Animal Ministry. Over the next couple years, we need to gain greater clarity on the long-term future of our need meeting ministries. One approach would be to stay focused tightly on the foregoing four existing need meeting ministries, seeking to make these as powerful as possible over time. Another approach would be to maintain these ministries, while adding an additional “big-ticket” item. For example, some have suggested that perhaps we should consider eventually launching a retirement community for GLBT people or a school for GLBT youth and/or children of GLBT parents. These are options that need to be vetted over time, with prayer and dialogue.

Uniqueness Of Our Mission

The style of ministry described above distinguishes JMCC from the vast majority of congregations. Most congregations take an either/or approach – either they emphasize person spiritual growth (*i.e.*, discipleship) but ignore justice and those in need, or they emphasize justice and poverty but ignore personal spiritual growth. We believe both are inextricably linked.

We do not fit the mold of the traditional GLBT affirming congregations. For historical, political, and doctrinal reasons, the vast majority of these congregations tend to be exclusively liberal and take a less activist, less encompassing approach to discipleship. By contrast, at JMCC we see faith as the central organizing principle of life. We believe a close personal relationship with God is essential. We believe that the presence of Christ within us transforms us, over time, from head to toe. Personal spiritual growth is critical.

Nor do we fit the mold of traditional conservative congregations. Although we share their passion for discipleship, we define discipleship much more holistically; we place emphasis on doing justice and helping the needy. Nor do we insist on strict doctrinal uniformity. We respect theological diversity. At Jesus MCC, we seek to promote a “university environment.” We agree on the basics of the Christian faith, but allow our people freedom to work out the details. We don’t all have to think alike. We encourage open exchange of ideas. We welcome Christians from both the conservative and liberal ends of the spectrum. What unites us is our passion for holistic discipleship – for striving to follow God and change the world through our daily lives.

We believe this style of ministry has both the energy and intelligence to reach millions of GLBT people. We are dedicated to pioneering this form of ministry and sharing it widely.

Worldwide Outreach

As we make progress in developing a model of ministry that is effective in the GLBT Community, we hope to begin sharing that model with other GLBT churches and with individuals beyond our geographic area. We will do so by:

- Publishing curriculum (*e.g.*, our Disciple-
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ship Training Series).

- Publishing books (e.g., *The Children Are Free*).
- Making more and more resources available through our web site.
- Webcasting, radio, and TV.
- Training more clergy candidates.
- Offering practical training to existing clergy and laity via workshops and conferences.
- Planting churches.
- Establishing a Missions Program.

These types of activities are essential if we are going to reach beyond our immediate congregation and influence the worldwide GLBT Christian movement.

Church Growth

To fully achieve our objectives, we must continue to grow the resources available here at JMCC. In Church literature, experts sometimes contrast “anchor” churches with “boutique” churches. A common rule of thumb in retail settings (especially shopping malls) is that large anchor stores are needed to support and ground a cluster of boutique stores. Churches are similar. In other words, every movement within Christianity needs one or more anchor churches to serve as resource centers for congregations who wish to follow that model of ministry.

Our emerging Discipleship Training Series is one example of this phenomenon at work. We are developing a systematic training program for making disciples in the GLBT Community. Doing this requires many gifted teachers, writers, administrators, and students, plus significant financial resources.

To generate these kinds of resources, anchor churches must grow large enough to accumulate substantial talent and income and to take advantage of economies of scale. By contrast,

boutique churches grow to a pre-determined size and then plant another church to maintain their small, specialized feel. They depend on anchor churches to develop resources like literature, clergy candidates, curriculum, and ministry innovations.

Increasingly, we see JMCC becoming an anchor church for other GLBT congregations inside and outside MCC who wish to follow a holistic discipling model of ministry.

This, in turn, requires us to realistically assess the amount of resources God might choose to bring together at JMCC:

- There are about 1.5 million people in the Indianapolis metropolitan area.
- Assume 7.5% of the population is GLBT.
- This means about 112,500 GLBT people live in the Indianapolis metropolitan area.
- If two of every ten GLBT people have children, and they have an average of 1.5 kids, there are about 33,750 children in the GLBT community.
- There are also other family members of GLBT people (brothers, sisters, and parents) who are affirming. Although this is more difficult to estimate, we assume a minimum of 6,250 such family members in the Indianapolis area.
- This yields 43,000 people as an estimate of children and “allies” in the GLBT community.
- Church studies show that some highly-effective churches are able to reach 1% of their potential target audience.

Based on the foregoing, if JMCC is highly effective over the next decade, we estimate its worship attendance could reach 1,555 per week. *See the following chart:*

1.5 million	People in Indy metro area
7.5 % GLBT	Conservative estimate of GLBT population
112,500 GLBT people	GLBT people in Indy metro area
43,000 family and “allies”	GLBT children, family members, and “allies” of GLBT community
155,500	Total GLBT, family, and “allies” community
1% reached by a particular church	Typical impact of a church in a community
1,555 congregants	Potential congregation for JMCC

If we wish to achieve our vision, we must be a congregation that is consistently open to growth and the changes that brings. Although this may not be the most comfortable approach to ministry, we believe it is worth the sacrifice in order to achieve our objective: enhancing the spread of the Gospel through GLBT Communities worldwide.

Conclusion

By God’s grace, we will stay focused on the mission described in this document. We will strive to do all we can with the resources God gives us. But in the final analysis, we recognize that although we can propose, God disposes. We will get nowhere without God’s blessing. We humbly ask for God’s guidance and blessing.