

GROW Team Report and Recommendations

Cross Roads Church

Part I

At the request of the session of Cross Roads Church, the GROW team was formed in January of 2018 with our assignment being to “discern and help to implement the direction of CRC’s ministry with children and youth, with the possibility of making recommendation for the hiring of new staff for this purpose.” Our team consisted of Nancy Rushing and Brian Diebold (co-chairs), Leon Butler, Sandy Delk, Kim Diebold, Lisa McDougle, and Stefan Wagar. Leon had to resign in July when he and his family moved, otherwise, our group met weekly over the course of 11 months to take on this important work. A special thanks to our honorary members, Elsie and Arlo Diebold, who also joined us for most meetings.

Background:

Our Question

Our first task as a group was to begin a process of discernment. Together we adopted the goal of what we called “spiritual indifference,” an attitude that involves laying down our own agendas and outcomes in order to achieve readiness and availability to God for whatever God wanted to do. While this was our starting place, we also found that this was an ongoing process for us where God was slowly helping us to process together our own, and the church’s, assumptions, baggage, and history in order to be open to a new future. Next, using our mission and vision statements, we defined our Question to God, which we used as a focus for our prayers and discernment each week. Our guiding question:

How would God like us to be the destination for young people to grow in God-centered loving relationships and for young people to seek and share the love of God more deeply?

Our Process

Together we began by studying the congregation’s history with youth and children, and creating a snapshot of current ministries [Appendix 1]. To do so, we met with and interviewed CE&Y elder Brenda Matthews and committee member Barbara Froebel, as well as former youth director, Nathan Devine. We also contacted youth directors of other churches with thriving programs, interviewed current youth at CRC, and sat in on a K-5 Sunday School class to talk to the children in attendance.

To gauge interest in possible future programming we conducted surveys of young families at the church’s Fiesta event in April and talked to parents at several local parks during the summer [Appendix 2]. We also read and discussed a number of articles on current trends towards intergenerational ministry in the church, took a field trip on a Sunday to visit another church, and participated in a webinar on different models of faith formation.

Together, we explored, discussed, and researched many different options for youth ministry at CRC. These ideas included hiring a full-time youth director; establishing CRC as a host site and center for youth mission trips during the summers; starting a Children’s Church to take place during the 11am

service; creating a “Prayground” in the sanctuary (a space near the front of the sanctuary where children can play quietly during the worship service while still being able to observe the service); starting a mid-week program based around music and art programming; and starting a mid-week program that would be a convergence of several community partners (e.g., BIAH, KidsHoops, FwdProgress2, Girl Scouts) on a single night combined with a dinner and small group discipleship time for youth offered by our church.

Lastly, we did lots of dreaming together, prayer, and listening. Together, we believe that we have come to a place of being able to offer a number of recommendations for this season in the life of Cross Roads Church in order for us to become the destination for young people to grow in God-centered, loving relationships and for young people to seek and share the love of God more deeply.

Lessons Learned

Acceptance

One of the hardest, yet most important lessons we learned as a group was to come to a place of acceptance with where we are at as a church and where God is leading us. Many of us assumed, and had been looking for, some big new exciting program or approach to attract more kids and young families. In fact, as reported above, we did explore many ideas. But each time, we did not feel God leading or calling us in these directions. They either felt like going back to old patterns of how youth ministry was done before, or came up to the road blocks of lack of resources or concern about the energy necessary to sustain a weekly program. Instead, what we saw is that God is sending us kids now. Perhaps not in large numbers, but there are kids here already. The place where God seems to be bringing people right now is through Sunday worship, and this is where we as a team felt led to focus our attention. Accepting and focusing on the children we have now was freeing in that we were able to set aside past expectations or the need for some “program,” and instead be open to a new path of “being church.”

Intergenerational Church

Our research showed us the importance of being intergenerational in our life together as a church. One of the unintended consequences of churches trying to create kid-friendly programming and special worship experiences just for youth has been that youth end up getting “siloes” away from the rest of the adult church. Relationships and connections with the rest of the congregation and worship are never created, so when young people age out of the youth group, they tend to drift away. On the other hand, a study by the Fuller Youth Institute, where a group of researchers spent a decade studying 500 youth group graduates, 50 families, and 200 congregations, found that the variable most correlated with a mature faith in high school and college was involvement in intergenerational worship and intergenerational relationships. As one of the study’s authors puts it: “bringing the generations to sit shoulder to shoulder or look eye to eye was more important for long-term faith than any other youth group activity.”¹ Another study emphasized the importance of having many adults invest in the life of each child, finding that 18 percent of youth group graduates who remain connected to the church had

¹ Kara Powel, *Preventing Teenage ‘Faith Drift’*, www.ChristianityToday.com, July 2016.

five or more adults invest in them spiritually and personally between the ages of 15 and 18.² From this, our group held onto the 5:1 principle, that for every young person we desire to have five adults who know their names, show up at important life events, are invested in their progress, and are modeling the faith.

Of course, there is still a place for separating out into different groups and classes based on age and development. Sunday school is a good example. Sometimes children need to be around others who are similar developmentally in order to learn and have fun. But two of our overarching goals as the GROW Team are to 1) see people of all ages invested in all aspects of church life, interacting and growing together through worship, learning, praying, and playing, and 2) that the whole congregation would continue to learn to be young at heart – that we would be youthful in our culture and attitudes. We see some of this already happening in our life together in that many children are already choosing to stay in worship rather than go to the nursery, and we have seen the congregation happily “playing along” when asked to join our children in an activity in order to show them encouragement. We believe God is calling us to live into this identity even more intentionally.

Events

Our main takeaway from our many discussions with past and current youth as well as the surveys conducted with people in the community is that people desire more events. Youth retreats, mission trips, and summer camp were consistently listed as having the most lasting impact for those who went through our youth program in the past. Likewise, many of the survey responses showed a desire for more fun activities to be provided for children. While this may not be the same as a regular, weekly program, we did hear a desire for more “one off” type events that would foster fun and fellowship.

Advertising

Another one of our takeaways from our survey work was that most people in our community were not aware of the events and programs going on at Cross Roads. There are also many young people and parents coming to our campus for different community partner activities who we are not effectively reaching. Our lesson learned is that if we are hoping to connect with our neighbors, more intentional attempts to communicate what is going on will be needed.

Partners

As we looked at who we are now and how God is calling us forward, we also became clear about the changed nature of Cross Roads Church. We are truly a “cross roads” of many different community partner groups that are serving and making a difference for the Kingdom of God. While this is a different model than the traditional model of the past where the congregation did everything independently, we came to see that we don’t have to do it all ourselves. There are many hungers and needs in the community that we are helping to meet by providing space and hospitality to groups that are doing what we by ourselves could not. Those groups include Ballin Is a Habit, KidsHoops, FwdProgress2, Girl Scouts and others that are all programs existing to serve at-risk youth. We hope to continue to grow into those partnerships and to be a destination for these young people to experience and share God’s love more deeply.

² Ibid.

Part II: Recommendations

In order to be the destination for young people to grow in God-centered, loving relationships and for young people to seek and share the love of God more deeply, the GROW team recommends that at this time we heed God's direction to wait on starting new programs and instead focus on serving well the young people and families coming to us now and in the future. To do so, we recommend the following:

1. **Become intentionally intergenerational in all areas of our life together as a church:**

In keeping with our mission statement, which says that we are to “nurture and celebrate God-centered, loving relationships in our increasingly diverse community,” we recommend that we be intentional about nurturing and celebrating relationships across generations. We have seen the church already begin on this path with such successes as our **Intergenerational Vacation Bible School** over the summer and our **church-wide breakfasts on communion Sundays using the “Sunday LIFT”** curriculum designed for gatherings of all ages. In addition, we also recommend:

- A. *Continue with monthly time together, either through church breakfasts or a monthly “kickstarter” time together in the chapel during the Sunday School hour.*

We believe that the breakfasts together on communion Sundays have been a great way to foster fellowship and to engage in intergenerational activities. However, we recognize that the church has only committed to doing this for an initial six month period. If the breakfasts do not continue, we recommend that on the first Sunday of each month people of all ages gather together in the chapel for the first 15 minutes of the Sunday School hour for prayer and activities before dispersing to go to individual classes. Our intent is that this time could be used to briefly discuss a Bible story or topic in groups, sing songs, or do silly activities so that we are sharing time together.

- B. *Encourage parents to sit in on Sunday School classes.*

We recommend that parents be invited and encouraged to join their children during Sunday School at least once a month. Perhaps a certain week of the month could be designated so that teachers could plan lessons and activities with this in mind. The benefits of this would be that parents and children have a chance to learn together at church, and it may possibly help children who don't yet attend to feel more comfortable trying the class out for the first time. The inspiration for this came from our experience as a team sitting in on a class one Sunday in order to talk with the children. Both children and adults seemed to enjoy the simple activity of coloring together, and it allowed for good conversation along the way. While parents often enjoy having the break that Sunday School can offer, we feel this is an important way for us to invest in the children.

- C. *Provide musical instruments and/or dance materials for children to use in the sanctuary.*

Our team initially explored two different ideas with what to do with children during worship. One idea was to initiate a children's church, where children would leave the sanctuary after

the children's message in order to go a separate space for their own time of worship. We decided not to pursue this option as we felt that this would be redundant with our Sunday school hour, and that many parents are already choosing to keep their children in worship anyways. We also considered the possibility of creating a "pray ground" in the sanctuary where children would be encouraged to sit and play during worship. However, after visiting a church that does this, we felt that it might be too distracting and parents might feel uneasy with a lack of clear expectations about what was and was not allowed.

Still, our desire was to encourage children to participate and engage meaningfully in worship, and we noticed that several of our children like to dance during the first worship songs. We propose having a table available up front with small musical instruments, ribbons, scarves, etc., for children to use when they feel so moved in order to dance and play along with the opening praise songs (11am) or hymn (9am). As part of this recommendation, we also encourage the session to consider removing the front row of pews in order to make more space for this and other liturgical movement. The availability of these materials would be advertised in the bulletin, and children (or adults) would only use them when they so desire (no one would be put on the spot). We also continue to look for ways to encourage worshipful expression by all ages during services.

- D. Incorporate children and youth into leading and learning about different elements of worship, and explore the possibility of starting a youth praise team.*

Wherever possible, we encourage the church to include children and youth as ushers, lay readers, slide operators, and musicians during our worship services. We also recommend that a youth praise team be formed if enough interest is found to lead a song (or service) several times during the year, or more often as appropriate. Such a group could be volunteer led and could be a one time thing (similar to the group formed to play handbells each year), or a regular activity depending on interest level.

- E. Adopt an "intergenerational mindset" in our culture and planning for all activities and events.*

Whenever possible, our hope is to be intentional about planning for intergenerational participation at all events and activities at the church. We also encourage our members to adopt the 5:1 principle of having at least 5 adults take a vested interest in each of our children. This includes a mentoring relationship where faith is "caught," not just "taught," and a genuine interest in the lives of our young people. While we may not have huge numbers of children at this time, the advantage is that we have an opportunity to truly invest in each child that comes through our doors.

2. Offer more special events for young people and families.

We heard repeatedly the desire for more fun and meaningful events for children, youth, and families. This includes things like retreats, mission trips, service opportunities, and fun outings such as bowling or mini golf, etc. While we did not feel led to start a weekly program, offering a

regular variety of events would still allow young families to feel that there is something at Cross Roads specifically for them, and would foster fellowship together. We also envision that with such an approach, we could easily invite the youth from both the Congolese (UPCM) and Ethiopian (EOTC) congregations to participate, allowing us to deepen our relationships together.

To carry out this vision, we propose that a coordinator position be created with a stipend of \$200/month to organize, advertise, and lead these events. We also recommend that an advisory team be created to assist this person with planning and outreach.

3. Start a Young Adult Group.

Just as we are working to meet the needs of children and youth, our intergenerational approach leads us to be invested in the unique needs of the young adults (18-30) in our congregation. We recommend the formation of a small group for young adults, facilitated by Stefan Wagar as a part of his duties as Assistant Youth Director, and that this group could then self-select its shape and direction based on the interest level and availability of its participants.

4. Advertise more intentionally around campus and in our neighborhood.

We recommend that bulletin boards, pamphlets, and flyers be used around campus in strategic locations such as outside the gym and in the Geneva Conference Center in order to communicate upcoming events and Sunday school offerings with young families coming on campus for partner activities. This could either be done as a part of the coordinator position (see above) or potentially by members of the CE&Y committee.

5. Investigate the possibility of starting a MOPS program.

Our list of recommendations is not intended to be exhaustive, nor to impede the creativity or initiative of other groups down the road. While still in the early stages of research by some of our church members, we believe that a program such as Mother's of Preschoolers might be a good fit with our congregation's emphasis on intergenerational relationships and attracting young families to our church.

Possible Recommendations for Down the Road:

The GROW Team commends the following ideas as options for the church to consider in the future as resources and interest level become available.

1. Resume an active youth group when the need arises.

While many of our current youth have aged out of the group, we envision that as youth become regular participants at Cross Roads in the future that a youth group or youth Sunday School class could be started up again when appropriate to meet their needs.

2. Mid-Week Convergence Youth Night

One possibility that we explored, but that we did not feel the time was right to start, was to work with our community partners to have one afternoon per week where all the relevant groups would meet at the same time (basketball, tutoring, etc.) in order to get a large group of kids to converge together on campus. We would use the chapel as a hangout space for youth during the afternoon in between activities (with snacks, homework help, games, etc.), and then offer a free dinner for all who stay along with an hour for small group youth ministry and/or worship. Ideally, the meals would be funded by the church and/or donations, with the meals being prepared by volunteers. Small groups and worship services would be led by the pastor as well as volunteers. However, we believe that a person would need to be hired for 5 hours/week to coordinate all of the volunteers, meals, and activities each week. If the budget were available to start such a program in the fall of 2019, we estimate the following costs for the first 18 weeks:

Food	\$2,200
Youth Worker	\$1,350 (\$15/hour)

We believe this could be an exciting way to begin a youth ministry that takes advantage of the presence of our partners without having to reinvent the wheel ourselves to get kids through the door. However, we were concerned about being spread too thin as a congregation as well as the availability of the finances to support such a program. For now, we list this option as a possibility to consider in the future.

3. Establish Cross Roads as a center for summer youth mission trips.

Looking at our vision to be a “destination congregation” in a slightly different way, we also explored the possibility of using our campus to host youth mission trips. Groups could volunteer at various non-profit agencies (San Antonio Food Bank, Haven for Hope, Agape, etc.) during the day and then stay in our facilities at night. We would coordinate the work sites and offer devotional time and worship in the evening. This would require an employee to work full time

during the summer weeks as well as some occasional hours throughout the rest of the school year. We see this as a possibility that could impact a larger number of youth beyond our normal reach (mission trips are often life changing events for participants) and could impact our community for good by bringing in extra help. We also saw this as one way that the church could pay for at least part of the expense of hiring a full-time youth director down the road. Based on conversations with a church in Nederland, CO that uses a similar model, we estimate that such a program could initially bring in \$10,000 per summer, which would be just enough to pay for staffing during those weeks. Larger programs charge between \$275-\$400 per participant, whereas a smaller one might be more likely to charge \$100-\$200. Other costs to be considered include a possible rate hike in insurance as well as increased use of utilities. However, such a program would also offer opportunities for church members to be involved, either by volunteering with the groups during the day, by sharing a meal together during the week, or by having groups join us for worship on Sundays. While our team thought this idea had potential, we also recognize that it would have to be part of a package coupled with hiring a full-time youth director.

Conclusion

It has been a privilege to work together as a team to listen to God and to offer these recommendations. The process has been a personal journey of growth and healing for many of us on the team and we believe that God worked through our time together. In closing we would like to offer the following prayer on behalf of our church that we might truly GROW as a destination for young people and their families:

Dear God, We thank you for the children of every age in our church. We know that we are all your children, and as you care for us and guide us we know we need to do the same for our own. We ask that you be with us as we share your love and light with every young person that comes through our doors. Help us to be a congregation that truly lives out our life together across generations and to learn more and more to be young at heart. Amen.

Appendix 1: Snapshot of Children/Youth Ministry at CRC, February 2018

Nursery - Sunday School. Worship - children's message during service.

Staff - Virginia Lopez and Susan Moore

K - 5 - Sunday School. The Spark Series curriculum. 2 to 5 children.

Volunteers - Lisa McDougle and Barbara Froebel

Youth/Young Adult group - every other Sunday. 3 to 5 young people.

Volunteers - Sandy Delk and Stefan Wagar

Painting and moving into the new youth room

Devotionals

Mission trip

Youth Sunday

Youth retreats - John Knox (fall), Mo Ranch (Jan.)

Youth elder - Liz McDougle

CE&Y Committee - Brenda Matthews

Partners -

BIAH - 6 days/week. 10 to 20 youth - elem through HS ages. Girl's team.

Kids Hoops - Saturdays. John Ybarra, Toreon Prince - possibly interested in a tutoring program here.

Appendix 2

Results from 13 Fiesta Surveys and 3 Park and Pool Surveys

Cross Roads Church – GROW Team Survey

Does your household have children or youth? Are they currently active in a youth group or church?	Ages- 0-2 years: 1 3-5 years: 2 6-12 years: 1 12-18 years: 2 Yes: 11 No: 4
If you were to search for a church or youth group, what things would you search for?	Non-judgmental; supportive; family activities; good worship service; games and drama; children’s ministry
Have you heard about any of the events we’ve held at CRC/JCPC?	Yes: 9 No: 7 (Respondents heard from signs in Windcrest and from Silbia Esparza.)
Do you want to be informed about special events? What is the best method of contact? Would you want to be included on our email list?	Yes: 6 No: 0 Email: 6 Cell: 4 Yes: 7 No: 1
When you hear “Youth Group” what comes to mind?	Help people. Study groups. Activities. Singing. Teens, young kids.
What do you think is the greatest need among youth in this community?	Structure and guidance. Unity. Activities. Connection with God. Patience. Support. Consistency. Community. Strong positive role model.
Why do you suppose most youth stay away from church? What could be done to fix that?	Boring. Peer pressure. Aren’t active in church. Not believing in God. Not a family priority. Social media. Have more fun activities. A relaxed environment.
What sort of activities would be most likely to draw you or your friends to participate?	Games. Arts and crafts. Sports. Something active that all ages enjoy.
What days or times during the week would be best for youth activities?	Fridays. Mornings (in the summer).
Is there anything we can pray about for you?	Do well in school; stay safe. Spouse.