

## *A Promise to Keep, A Promise to Join* *Metro East Baptist Church*

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

Ephesians 2:19-22

Remembering is an important part of the life of God's people. "Remember the Lord" is a common refrain in Scripture. It is a means by which God encourages His people by reminding them of His great faithfulness in the past. For this reason the people of Israel were called to regularly mark the important times in their past through celebration and worship. The Passover, for instance, was a way of commemorating God's extraordinary act of deliverance from the clutches of Egypt. The Feast of Tabernacles was a celebration in remembrance of the Lord's presence with His people during their wilderness wanderings.

While the church, the New Covenant people of God, is not under obligation to celebrate the various feast days of the past they have been given one important act of commemoration by the Lord Jesus. "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me'" (I Cor. 11:23-25). Jesus gave to His people the physical signs of bread and cup so that we might regularly and graphically remember His sacrifice on our behalf. Remembering is in the spiritual DNA, as it were, of God's people.

On June 11, 2006 Metro East Baptist Church voted unanimously to appoint a Strategic Ministry Planning Team to survey the congregation, identify current strengths and weaknesses, and devise an action plan for moving into the future. This was no small task to be sure. But there was one more responsibility the Planning Team was asked to do: write a history of Metro East Baptist Church. We are still a relatively young church. The group that formed Metro East began meeting in the spring of 1995. However, we, like all churches, have a story. We have not lived in a vacuum for the past twelve years. We have prayed and preached and worshiped and witnessed. We have amassed wonderful memories of how God has blessed us, disciplined us, taught us, and provided for us. We have memories of success, failure, exhilaration, and heartbreak. Our story is inextricably bound up in God. To think about our brief history is to think about God's works and ways. And while some of our remembrances make us cringe, many more make us want to sing. How kind God has been to us!

So read on and remember with us. Let your memories become songs of thanks to our God who loves His bride and promises to present her before Himself one day holy and without spot or wrinkle. As we move forward let us not forget how God has so faithfully cared for us already.

## The Promise Is Made

It was in the early 1990's that a handful of men and women from Metropolitan Baptist Church in downtown Wichita, Kansas began to dream about a church on the east side of the city. At the time there were no Southern Baptist churches in the Eastern part of the metropolitan area that had grown. The vision was to see a vibrant Bible-believing, Gospel-proclaiming, God-loving church formed that would contribute something valuable toward the advancing of God's kingdom.

It can be a risky thing to start a church. A great deal of financial, emotional, and of course spiritual resources are required. It is hard work. And this was certainly the case for the fledgling Metro East. But the small community of men and women who formed this body had, in a sense, made a promise. Starting the church required more than simply dipping a toe into the waters to see if all the conditions were favorable. It meant jumping into the unknown – body and soul. It meant these families would promise their time, money, and gifts in service to the Lord and one another. It is that promise that fired their commitment and passion.

## The Church Is Born

Since its founding, Metro East benefited from the friendship and preaching of Roger Roberts. Dr. Roberts had been pastor of Metropolitan Baptist Church since 1983. Each Sunday he and the minister of music would lead worship at Metro East and Metropolitan. The schedule was taxing but the young congregation was blessed by the able preaching of Dr. Roberts.

Metro East began to grow. There were some Sundays when as many as 200 people attended morning services. But as the church grew so did its need for hands-on guidance from a pastor. The synergy that helped lead to the early growth began to wane as the vacuum for leadership was not filled. Metro East also suffered from the losses of precious friends and hard workers through job transfers. For the young church these losses were deeply felt. The people of Metro East knew that it was time to begin looking for a full-time pastor of their own. They knew however that this decision could lead to hard feelings from their friends at Metropolitan Baptist. They had no desire to hurt Dr. Roberts or to be perceived as disloyal. However, if Metro East was going to move from being a small satellite congregation to being the church of their early vision, then a move was going to be necessary.

The decision to become an independent church rather than remain a satellite of Metropolitan Baptist was painful for many. Some at the downtown church saw it as a betrayal. Those within Metro East were troubled by the stress this placed upon once close relationships. But the going was rarely easy in those early days and the young church faced the kinds of problems that are

common in most congregations. Soon after deciding to look for a full-time pastor, Metro East found themselves on their own. Each week they had to secure a preacher to fill the pulpit. Churches generally suffer from such arrangements because of the lack of leadership and a consistent preaching ministry.

During this time a committee was formed to draft a constitution and by-laws as a preliminary step to becoming a full-fledged church. On June 21, 1999 the Articles of Incorporation were signed making Metro East Baptist an autonomous Southern Baptist church. Metro East would now be a member of the Kansas-Nebraska Convention of Southern Baptists and the Heart of Kansas Southern Baptist Association.

The new church was meeting in a fairly high rent office building then called Terradyne Office Park. The office building was unique in that it had a chapel that seated approximately 200 people. Office space and hallways were used for Sunday School. There were times when less expensive space was searched for but thankfully Metro East received much needed financial support from the state and local denominational organizations. Another friend was Faith Baptist Church of Andover who helped by allowing Metro East to use their building for baptism on Sunday afternoons.

From its first days Metro East was blessed with a lot of children. This presents a challenge for a church meeting in an office building. For instance, holding Vacation Bible School was no easy task. Building management as well as the other tenants were concerned about the noise and other disruptions this could bring. The faithful people who led the children's ministry in those days had to be resourceful and flexible. The last summer at Terradyne saw some 130 kids gather for VBS. It was quite a feat to transport that many children from the first floor to the third floor, from inside activities to outside activities without getting kicked out. It was a close call several days.

There was something very special about those days. A great deal of cooperation and flexibility was called for. It is precisely those kinds of attitudes that are essential to the continued health and growth of the church. But it is those very attitudes which seem to diminish with the ever increasing comforts of an established church. Metro East continues to challenge those who join to maintain a sacrificial spirit. Adults, for example, are encouraged to not get too attached to their Bible Fellowship rooms because at any time they could be needed for preschool or children's space. So it goes at Metro East. It has never been a church where those wanting a quiet place to retire and go unnoticed have been entirely comfortable. May this always be the case.

## The Pastor Is Found

On February 7, 1999 Metro East selected a pastor search committee. The committee was made up of Ernie Castro (chairman) Ruth Claybrooks, Jim Elmore, Sharon Garton, Susan Lair, Bob McGrew, and Billy Rigby. With much prayer and sober spirits the committee began the process of looking for a pastor to help lead their beloved church.

During this time, Bob and Ann Walker, former members of Metropolitan who had since moved to Kansas City had someone in mind for their friends at Metro East. He had never served as a senior pastor but during his days in seminary was the Walker children's youth pastor in Lenexa, Kansas. They thought he may be a good fit for the new church in Wichita. It was March 1999 and Bob Walker decided to give his friend, now a youth pastor in Oklahoma, a phone call.

Todd Pruitt was a 32 year old youth pastor serving at First Baptist Church of Moore, Oklahoma when he first learned about Metro East. A native of Houston, Texas Todd had served in youth ministry since he was 19 in churches in Texas, Arkansas, and Kansas City. After attending the University of Houston for two years he transferred to Southwest Baptist University in 1987 where he met his wife-to-be Karen. They were married in 1990 and in 1992 moved to Kansas City where Todd attended Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and served as a part-time youth pastor at a new church in Lenexa. After graduating from seminary the Pruitts moved with their baby daughter Kate to Oklahoma City.

In March of 1999 Todd received a phone call from his friend Bob who informed him that he had given his name to a new church in Wichita that was looking for their first pastor. Todd recalls thinking something along the lines of, "I'm not moving to Wichita! I'm the youth pastor at a large church. I have a big budget. I have job security." But he knew that God was preparing him to pastor a church. His hope, however, was that it would be a church in Texas. Later that Spring Todd received a phone call from Jim Elmore asking if there would be a time when the Pastor Search Committee could come to Oklahoma City to visit about the opportunity at Metro East. Having always had a problem telling people "no" Todd agreed to the meeting even though he had every intention of explaining to the Search Committee that they would need to continue searching.

In June of 1999, only a month after a devastating tornado in Oklahoma City the Pastor Search Committee met with Todd and Karen at a restaurant in Norman, Oklahoma. Todd's approach was fairly direct if not a bit cynical: "Be honest about your weaknesses and the kind of church you want to be a part of and they will not want you." He even told them what kind of music he would want the church to do in their worship services. This he thought for sure would be the *coupe de gras*. But Todd was surprised by what happened. The committee members did not seem troubled by his words and Todd and Karen found themselves wanting to have a second conversation.

That summer Todd and Karen made two trips to Wichita. Their first visit was for the purpose of getting acquainted with some of the people of Metro East. They gathered for dinner at Wes and Sharon Garton's home with a group of other families to talk about church and ministry. It was during this visit that Todd and Karen gained a settled peace about coming to Metro East. The next step was to return for a Sunday to preach.

The Pruitt family returned to Wichita in July of 1999 so that Todd could meet with the Deacons and preach in the Sunday morning service. That evening Todd shared his vision for ministry and the church. Afterward, the sixty-nine voting members present (for the time this was a good showing) were called upon to make an important decision. Jeff Claybrooks, chairman of

the Deacons recommended on behalf of the Pastor Search Committee and Deacons that Metro East Baptist extend an invitation to Todd Pruitt to serve as Senior Pastor. A ballot vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting ended in celebration with the Pruitt family now becoming a part of the Metro East family.

On September 17, 1999 Todd Pruitt preached his first sermon as pastor of Metro East Baptist Church. His message was drawn from Exodus 33 which describes Moses' intercession for the people of God. His prayer was that, in spite of the people's sin God would still go with them into the land of promise. Moses prayed, "If Your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people?" (vv. 15-16). In many ways this has continued to be the prayer of Metro East. The priority has not been to have the most impressive buildings or easiest schedule but to know the gracious and powerful presence of God.

## The Fellowship Is Blessed

### **Blessed with a growing congregation**

When Pastor Pruitt came to Metro East the average attendance hovered around 120 persons. During the first eighteen months of Todd's ministry the attendance did not budge. This became a source of discouragement to the pastor who as a youth minister in a large church knew the pressures of numeric results. What is more, several families left because they could not adapt to their new pastor's vision and leadership. Todd suffered from loneliness during those months. He was accustomed to serving on a large staff but was now by himself in an office on the second floor of the Terradyne office park having no colleagues with which to share the burdens of ministry. He began to wonder if he had made a mistake by coming to this new church.

Metro East was meeting in an office building and did not have many resources available to invest in advertising. In a way this was healthy because all of the Sunday visitors in those days came because they had been invited by church members. But it is hard for a church to grow when few people in the community even know it exists. This can be very frustrating because a church that is not growing lacks synergy and a sense of excitement. Pastor Todd did not want to return to the days of constant pressure to meet numeric goals but he knew that a continued lack of growth would eventually lead to uncertainty about his future at Metro East.

Early in 2000 Metro East voted unanimously to appoint a building committee for the purpose of securing designs for a facility that would occupy the 15 acres the church owned on 143<sup>rd</sup> Street. It was believed that growth would surely follow the completion of a building. But something unusual began to happen. It seemed that out of the blue Metro East began to grow. There was no program to achieve this. The church set no attendance goals nor did they host any "pack a pew" Sundays. It seemed to "just happen." In less than two years the church grew by over 100 percent in average attendance. They packed the little chapel at Terradyne twice on Sunday mornings and completely filled the rooms used for Sunday School even meeting in the hallways.

This caused concern over the building project on 143<sup>rd</sup> Street. The church was outgrowing the new building before it was even completed. On three different occasions the church had to authorize adding space to the building as it was being built. Construction on phase two which was made up primarily of space for the youth ministry was begun before phase one was finished.

On February 23, 2003 Metro East celebrated their first Sunday in the new building. What a great day that was! There were over 500 people present for the first service. Pastor Todd challenged the congregation to be a church driven by a passion for God. As the congregation left the building that day they were greeted by a beautiful but rather inconvenient snow fall. The plan to gather that evening for a baptismal service was cancelled due to the wintry conditions. But spirits were high and there was a wide spread feeling of gratitude for all that God had provided since the little group of families first started meeting.

By the time Metro East moved into her new building, average worship attendance was just over 300 souls. The space that was gained from the new building was quickly filled and it became necessary to move to two worship services just three months after moving in. This was a great encouragement to Metro East.

The addition of the second worship service added valuable space. But it soon became clear that the need for additional education space was the next challenge. Metro East was blessed to see the number of youth and children increasing substantially. The schedule of one Sunday School hour flanked by two worship services was no longer sufficient. In January of 2004 the church adjusted the schedule once again to allow for a second hour of Sunday School. This presented a challenge to find enough workers to staff the added positions created by the new schedule particularly for the children and preschoolers.

It was not long before the staff and others in the congregation began to wonder if it was time to add a third worship service. Initially, Pastor Todd was reluctant to make the move. His concern was that a new 11:00 service would be so sparsely attended that it would lack any sense of dynamism that had characterized the other services. However, after a lot of thought and prayer Todd relented and agreed to the change. On February 6, 2005 Metro East changed their schedule once again to allow for an 11:00 worship service. The Sunday schedule was now corporate worship at 8:00, 9:30, and 11:00 and Sunday School at 9:30 and 11:00. It certainly made for a full morning.

Pastor Todd was surprised by the response to the new service. He had expected a gathering of less than fifty but instead close 100 attended from the beginning. Much of the attendance represented new growth. In fact in the months following the addition of the 11:00 service average attendance at Metro East grew by over 100 persons. A pattern had developed that gave the church much encouragement: Every time additional space was added by building or schedule changes it was not long before it was filled.

It is easy for a church to consider itself successful if it gathers a crowd. The substantial growth experienced by Metro East was indeed a source of encouragement. The pastoral staff felt affirmed by the growth. But it is also true that numeric growth alone is no reliable indicator of God's blessing. The world is skilled at gathering crowds for everything from football games to

good music to inventory reduction sales. One symbolic step Metro East made to guard against “the idolatry of the crowd” was to cease publishing their attendance statistics in the monthly newsletter. The pastors knew too well the tendency to judge success or failure strictly on numeric valuations. This also led to a decision to avoid setting numeric goals and holding high attendance Sundays. Undergirding these decisions was the belief that God will grow His church His way in His time and for His glory. Rather than being concerned about growing larger the commitment of the pastors was to grow more faithful and let God handle the numbers.

### **Blessed with a growing staff**

Jason Jolly joined the Metro East staff in May of 2000 as associate pastor of worship and youth. He was young and newly married to his wife Erin. The church benefited greatly from Jason’s skills and gentle leadership. Early on, Jason demonstrated a wonderful ability to take the great hymns of Isaac Watts, the Wesleys, and others and breathe fresh life into them using new arrangements. It was encouraging to hear from younger adults who were rediscovering these great old songs. Jason seems to effortlessly weave together the doctrinally rich songs of the past with the new songs that have become a blessing to the church. During Jason’s ministry Metro East was blessed to see more singers and musicians join our fellowship. Each week in our worship services a faithful team of musicians have blessed us by generously giving their time and talents to lead God’s people in worship.

Prior to coming to Metro East Jason had served with Todd as one of his youth interns at First Baptist Moore. As a result Jason had experience planning youth events and teaching. Under Jason the youth group was blessed with some important new experiences. Jason helped plan and lead two mission trips to Mexico and participated with several other youth pastors in organizing their own camp.

As Metro East began to grow it was becoming clear that an additional man was needed to help provide support and direction in Christian education. At the time, Doug and Gayla Holt and their three daughters Lysie, Kaley, and Ashlea had recently begun attending Metro East. Doug had served as the youth pastor of Metropolitan Baptist for eleven years before finding himself without church employment. One day pastor Todd had a conversation with another church member about the possibility of bringing Doug on staff at Metro East. After numerous other discussions the idea came in the form of a motion in the October 2001 business meeting. The vote was unanimous and greeted with spontaneous applause. That evening Todd Pruitt, Ric Crowder, and Ernie and Caroline Castro had the privilege of going to the Holt home to tell Doug that even though no one had spoken to him about the matter, the church had just voted to hire him as Associate Pastor of Discipleship. To the benefit of Metro East Doug agreed to serve. His seemingly boundless energy and cheerful spirit make him a pleasure with which to serve.

Now there were three: Todd, Jason, and Doug. But something happened that not many people expected: The church’s growth began to surge upward even though they were meeting in a rented facility without any visible signs to announce their presence to the community. At the time Jason Jolly, serving as both youth and worship pastor was also finishing his education through Wichita State University and was a new father as well. It was becoming clear that a combination role of music and youth was not going to be beneficial for much longer. Todd

appealed to the personnel team to give him the freedom to begin searching for a full-time youth pastor. There was fear expressed that with current staff and now a new building under way that church financial resources were going to be stretched to the limit.

These are important moments in the life of a church. Often times the investment in a new staff member has to be seen as a catalyst for further growth and not simply a response to current growth. The pastor agreed that hiring another staff pastor could stretch resources thin but he felt confident that a new youth pastor would result in more resources rather than less. After some conversations and a lot of prayer the personnel team agreed to request that Metro East approve creating a position for a new youth pastor. The church's approval was unanimous.

As with Jason and Doug the position of youth pastor would not have to be filled by a stranger. Kris McGee who had served as Todd's associate in the youth ministry at First Baptist Moore had just graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary and had expressed a willingness to come to Metro East. There was no question in Pastor Todd's mind that Kris was the man to serve as minister to youth. He would frequently venture onto the new building's construction site and stand praying on the area of concrete slab where the youth pastor's office would be located. He prayed specifically that God would bring his trusted friend to Wichita. After spending a weekend meeting with parents and other groups Metro East was convinced that Kris McGee was the man to serve as their new youth pastor. In January of 2003, just one month before moving into the new building Kris and his wife Adrienne came to Metro East. Since coming to Wichita God has blessed the McGee family with two children: Elisabeth and Lucas.

Over the next few years the growth continued. Sometimes the growth came quickly while other times rather slowly. This brought greater pressure upon the staff. Everyone agreed and often joked about the fact that Doug Holt had far too many responsibilities. He was in charge of all the educational ministries of the church as well as building maintenance, fellowships, and outreach events. The church knew that something was going to have to change but had found out that owning a building was far more expensive than simply renting. As a result it was easy to put off the decision to add additional staff. But as the pastors found their time and abilities maxed out so, too, was the church's potential for continued growth.

Fortunately Metro East approved an additional pastor's salary in the budget for 2006. At the time it was not known what the next staff position would be and there was certainly no idea who the Lord would add to the team of pastors. And then someone happened across their path. John and Kelley Ulrich and their two children Elisabeth and Calvin were home in Wichita for a six month furlough from Zimbabwe where John taught at Harare Theological College.

John and Kelley had been seeking the Lord concerning their future. Were they to stay in Zimbabwe or pursue ministry in another field? These were taxing days. The Ulrichs had understandably become attached to their adoptive home and the people that they had come to love. They used their furlough in the United States to seek the Lord's will. It was near the end of this time that Todd presented the idea of joining the Metro East staff to John and Kelley. While their first response was skeptical they began to warm to the idea over a period of several weeks. They had sensed an affinity with Metro East during their visits on Sundays. Their primary concern was adapting to a fast-paced and often overly cluttered way of doing church

than what they had known in Africa. Nevertheless, through much prayer and many conversations the Ulrichs felt affirmed in agreeing to come to Metro East once their final term at Harare Theological College was done.

In August of 2006 the Ulrichs joined the Metro East family after a long and emotional parting with their home in Zimbabwe. John brings to Metro East years of experience teaching pastors how to teach the Bible. His enthusiasm for God's Word and Christian education are infectious.

With John Ulrich's presence on the staff, Doug Holt became the Associate Pastor of Community Life. When a church grows quickly pastoral care often suffers. The ministry of Community Life was created to ensure that the needs of fellowship, pastoral care, and new member assimilation were adequately served. Doug's gifts for ministering to people's needs and his willingness to be inconvenienced for the sake of others have made him a wonderful fit for his new role.

God has been very good to give Metro East a pastoral staff who love and trust each other. There is a genuine affection among the pastors that is rare in the church today. Each one of these men have experience serving in churches where competition and mistrust were common among the staff. They do not want to repeat the many mistakes that they have seen. The people of Metro East who interact with the staff during the week regularly observe the amount of laughter that goes on in the office. It is a blessed congregation that produces happy pastors and happy pastors are a blessing to a congregation.

### **Blessed with growing influence**

The church of the first century described in Acts as well as by secular historians was one that had influence. To be sure, the church was at times hated and cruelly persecuted. But she had extraordinary influence. This was often begrudgingly acknowledged by no less than the Roman Emperor Julian who observed that not only did the Christians (often referred to as atheists) care for their own but they also reached out and cared for their fellow citizens in the empire. Christians were known for their charity and non-violence. They also had a habit of rescuing discarded babies.

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

- Acts 2:42-47

Metro East is not called to be a social services organization. Our concern goes far deeper. That does not mean that we are to be disengaged from social concerns such as the plight of the poor. Indeed, we must strive to be the kind of church that is known for remarkable charity. However, all of our charity and community involvement must serve the greater purpose of making the gospel known. People's physical needs are mere shadows of their deeper spiritual need. This is why we give, send, and go for the sake of missions. This is why, week after week,

we proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ from the pulpit, in small groups, and in countless other ways.

Metro East has been actively involved in Operation Christmas Child which provides Christmas gifts and a gospel witness to impoverished children around the world. We have the privilege of serving as the area collection center for this ministry.

MOPS or Mothers of Preschoolers is a ministry of encouragement and outreach to mothers of young children. Because of a dedicated group of women Metro East has been blessed with a growing MOPS ministry. Most recently ('06-'07) the MOPS group has seen as many as 40 women and over 90 children.

In our days at Terradyne Metro East began hosting a Community Easter Egg hunt on the Saturday before Easter. The idea came to life in an effort to let the community know that a church was gathering at the office building at the corner of 159<sup>th</sup> Street and Central. From the beginning it exceeded expectations. We have been pleased to see this annual event attract over 700 people from our community. There are members of Metro East whose first exposure to the church was the Easter egg hunt.

Of great significance is the growing commitment to missions at Metro East. Groups and individuals from Metro East have gone to places as wide ranging as Mexico, Canada, Africa, Eastern Europe, Spain, The Philippines, and South America. Metro East is also a sponsor church for a couple serving with Missions Aviation Fellowship in the Republic of the Congo. One of the marks of God's blessing is seen in the fact that in 2006 Metro East was able to contribute more money to the cause of missions than the amount of their total operating budget in 2000.

### The Challenge Is Faced

In order to navigate the many challenges that routinely confront the church it is important to state clearly why we exist and what commitments we have made to remain a distinctively Christian church. The Strategic Ministry Planning Team was charged with the responsibility of drafting fresh statements of vision and mission. What resulted was a purpose statement, a process statement, and a lengthier statement of seven core distinctives. While we do not invest any unique powers in such statements we do believe it is important for the church to clearly and regularly communicate "the why" behind its existence.

### **The Single Purpose**

***By God's grace Metro East will make known in word and deed the Lordship and love of Jesus throughout Wichita and the world for the sake of God's glory and the salvation of sinners.***

The purpose statement answers the question, "Why does Metro East exist?" This particular statement acknowledges our dependence upon God and assures that our purpose to bring Him glory is Christ-centered and mission focused.

### **The Simple Process**

***We will love God, love one another, and go to the world.***

This is the application of the purpose statement. It helps to answer the question, "How will Metro East fulfill their purpose?" This statement, drawn from the Great Commission and the Great Commandment, needs to be very clear and brief because it will serve as a grid by which we evaluate our ministries. In other words, each ministry / activity needs to fit within this simple process. Each activity needs to be assessed on the basis of its value in helping people to either 1) Love God, 2) Love one another, or 3) Go to the world. The goal is to simplify and strengthen church programming.

### **The Seven Pillars**

The seven pillars help answer the question, "What is distinctive about Metro East?" Every church is different. Metro East will not attempt to meet every expectation or serve every preference. It is important to explain the rationale behind the way we do things. The Seven Pillars explain the positions we have staked out on issues like worship, fellowship, and evangelism. In addition the seven pillars express our desire to be biblical in all we do and to keep God's glory our uppermost priority.

### ***Metro East Baptist Church will...***

1. Honor God with biblical and excellent worship that engages both mind and affections.
2. Faithfully proclaim the Word of God.
3. Strive for a fellowship that demonstrates in both word and deed the beauty of the Gospel.
4. Train disciples of Jesus who gladly reflect the holiness of God in all of life.
5. Equip and send out disciples to love our community with the mercy and hospitality of Jesus Christ.

6. Give cheerfully and sacrificially from our God-given resources for the building up of the church.

7. Advance the Gospel throughout our city and around the world.

### **The Leadership Challenge**

The church belongs to her Lord Jesus Christ. We look to His Word not only for the substance of our doctrine but also for the structure of our leadership. The Bible is neither silent nor indifferent about how the church is to be led. As we have studied God's Word it has become clear that the church is to be led by a plurality of leaders or elders. These are to be men who meet the qualifications spelled out in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Godly lay elders will add a welcome layer of wisdom to the pastoral staff. The challenge is to make sure we do not select men who are ill suited for this vital ministry of leadership. The right men, that is, men who are qualified and eager to do the spiritually demanding work of leadership, will be an incalculable blessing to the church.

As these men faithfully lead and care for the body of Christ it is the church's responsibility to pray for and encourage them. "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith" (Heb 13:7). "We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work" (I Thess 5:12-13).

### **The Discipleship Challenge**

The Great Commission makes it clear that evangelism is not simply seeking to gain church attendees or even to make converts only. The commission given to the church by Jesus is to make disciples, that is, Christ-followers. This disciple-making priority must be the heartbeat of our ministries.

Discipleship is a broad subject. It begins with evangelism. Metro East needs to avoid pre-packaged, one-size-fits-all evangelism programs. It is important that we not treat people like projects but instead love them as our neighbors. The Gospel is powerful. Indeed, Scripture tells us that the gospel "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..." (Rom 1:16). This is why we do not need to trust in the latest evangelistic fads or lengthy and emotional invitations. The Gospel faithfully proclaimed, explained, and lived out is the power of God to save.

Great Commission evangelism calls the church to train believers in Jesus to be fully devoted followers of Jesus. In Jesus' own words we are to teach them to obey everything He has said. That happens at Metro East in several ways. Certainly faithful obedience to Christ is proclaimed from the pulpit. Beyond that however it is important that people know the sanctifying effects of smaller groups where community and accountability can be developed. This begins, of course in the family. We are committed to seeing the family become the primary source for the evangelism and discipleship of children. We are also committed to seeing the people of Metro East involved in the various smaller Bible study group opportunities that are offered. Among

them are Sunday School (preschool – youth), Bible Study Fellowship (adults), Body Life (Sunday pm), Ladies Bible studies, and home small groups. There are also groups that gather regularly during the week for the purpose of prayer.

### **The Unity Challenge**

The body of Christ is made up of saved sinners. This means that growing together is never easy or free from serious challenges. We each possess a tendency toward self-exaltation. As a church increases in size the tendency is for its members to grow more and more self-centered. The early days of shared sacrifice and flexibility seem to fade away and demands for services increase. The challenge is to become a community of people who are by God's grace growing to love and serve one another.

When conflicts come, and they surely will, we must be committed to resolving them in a biblical and timely way. This will happen as the pastors, elders, and teachers of the church impart a vision for and provide training in biblical conflict resolution.

### **The Facility Challenge**

Numeric growth is a blessing. We thank God for every person He adds to our fellowship. But additional people require additional space. Much prayer and wisdom will be needed as we seek to balance our commitments to ministry and missions with the need to supply more space. Building is never a cheap endeavor. It requires a lot of money and a lot of attention. Too many churches sink into unmanageable debt and become unable to do the very basic sorts of ministry to which they are called because they built beyond their means. When a church faces financial troubles it tears at the fabric of their unity and hinders their fruitfulness. Metro East will need to carefully weigh how much is appropriate to spend on buildings. For instance, when does an appropriate desire to build a quality facility turn into an excuse for luxury? While we are thankful for this challenge we must keep a careful watch on our sinful hearts.

Because Metro East is committed to fellowship and teaching as means toward making disciples it is important that we provide sufficient educational and gathering space. This is not a luxury. Indeed it is part and parcel of our purpose. Buildings are means to an end, not the end itself. As good stewards it will be important for Metro East to maximize the current property by building wisely before moving on to a new location if the Lord wills.

In her still brief history Metro East has been blessed with a glorious past. How gracious God has been and what wonderful things He has done in and through the lives of those who have joined themselves to the promise made by the handful of men and women who first envisioned this fellowship.

For all God has done we give Him thanks. Whatever failures there are belong wholly to us sinners who make up the body of Metro East. But where our sin abounds God's grace abounds even more. We thank God for raising up those who first began to gather in 1995. We thank God for planting Metro East in the fastest growing area of Kansas. We thank God for securing fifteen acres on 143<sup>rd</sup> Street while the fellowship was still quite small. We praise Him for those who have labored and continue to give themselves to the ministries of teaching, worship, administration, evangelism, hospitality, and service. We praise God for raising the resources and

sending many of our people to various parts of the world for the sake of spreading the gospel. We praise Him for establishing a commitment to passionate biblical exposition from the pulpit. We also praise God for the reverent and joyful worship through which He has inspired us and glorified Himself.

But we remain unsatisfied. There is still so much to do. As long as we live in a city, a nation, and world that so desperately need Christ we must be filled with a holy dissatisfaction with our current condition. God, whom we seek to serve, has promised one day that “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). With such an awesome vision set before us by God how can we ever be content with the status quo? We have not yet seen the gospel of the Lord Jesus flood our city. Charles Spurgeon once wrote, “The Christian church was designed from the first to be aggressive. It was not intended to remain stationary at any period, but to advance onward until its boundaries become commensurate with those of the world.”

God still has much for us to do. We live as those with hope among the hopeless. We live as those who can see among the sightless. With a history already so rich in blessing how can we look to the future with anything less than joyful anticipation? Let us link arms and hearts to serve the One who so marvelously served us. Let us march forward into the days ahead with a fresh zeal to do even greater things for Christ and His kingdom. Let us join the promise of those who first gathered as Metro East Baptist Church with the hope that God would raise up something truly special.