

## ***Looking to the Future***

### **Our Participation in... The Center for Excellence in Congregation Leadership**

***By Rev. Greg Creasy***

Over the past few years, I have had an increasing desire to be involved in some continued education as a pastor and church leader. I have looked at several different options, praying that God would make the direction I should take very clear. I have looked at a Doctor of Ministry degree program, but nothing was of interest. My desire has been to become a better church leader...all the while building a church to honor Jesus Christ. Last year, I found out about a program called the Center for Excellence in Congregational Leadership.

This is a program designed to train church leaders...not just pastors...to help build healthy churches. As I researched this program, I was drawn to the holistic components of the program. It will be of great benefit to me personally, but will also help to train key leadership in our church future endeavors. The program will also help us in a time of crafting a vision for our church and in developing a strategic plan for implementing that vision. The program will also help to support the ongoing efforts of Pea Ridge Baptist as we move into the next 50 years of our ministry in this community.

We are at a pivotal time in the life of our church. I really believe that God is preparing us for a period of purposeful, intentional ministry to our community and a season of dynamic growth as the body of Christ. And you are going to be part of this! I am excited to ask for your participation in this entire process. First, I would ask that you pray for our church.

- Pray that God will open our eyes to the needs of those in our community.
- Pray that we would be focused outwardly and not just inwardly.
- Pray for God to raise up the right leaders and resources to do all that He calls us to do.
- Pray for this time of personal growth for me and for other leaders in our congregation.
- Pray that we will stand strong against the forces of Satan as we allow God to lead us.
- Pray that our church would be determined to step out in faith when God opens doors.
- Pray for personal faith to live your life in God's will.

Second, I want to ask you to continue to remain faithful in your worship, study and service. Remember, this is the key to a strong disciple - and strong disciples are key to a healthy, vibrant church. God has gifted each of us for his service and we need to remain faithful in all the ways He is currently using us.

I have included in this article some information about the Center for Excellence in Congregational Leadership (CECL). I want you to be informed as we move through this process of reflection and systematic change as we build our church, Pea Ridge Baptist, to be an agent reflecting Jesus Christ to the community and world.

#### **What is CECL?**

***A voyage, powered by the winds of the Holy Spirit, to realize God's dreams for pastors, their churches and their families.***

The journey lasts for 5 sessions held over a two year period at the beautiful Green Lake Conference Center in south central Wisconsin. The first session looks at personal & pastoral integrity: the foundation to sustaining pastoral excellence. The speakers are pastors, with class four to be led by Dan Southerland and Bill Lenz.

- The peer teams, led by a coach, are formed during session one to provide the mentoring, coaching, accountability and encouragement to enable goals to be realized. Between the sessions, the peer teams stay connected in-person, by phone or e-mail, and through one-on-one calls with their coach.
- Free time is a key component of every session, allowing time for physical and spiritual rejuvenation through various activities available on campus.

In the second session, the pastors come to focus on visioning, strategic planning and leading change, led by George Bullard for class four. The spouse and children under 18 come in for the weekend and the emphasis turns to building and sustaining a healthy family balance. A highlight is a date night, with a banquet and entertainment! Class four will be led by Dr. Dan and Mary Southerland.

The third session focuses on creating and strategically implementing the vision to build church health. Dr. Paul Borden and Tim Brown lead the first part of the week with the pastors, and then Dr. Dan Southerland teaches “Transitioning” with the pastors and a group of their lay leaders who have come for the weekend.

Session four begins with “Rethinking Leadership: Equipping Pastors to Discover and Effectively Use Their Leadership Style”, led by Dr. Dan Southerland and/or Dr. Glenn Wagner. The lay leaders come back for the weekend to join the pastors and the focus turns to “Winning on Purpose: How to Organize Congregations to Succeed in Their Mission”, led by Dr. John Kaiser.

CECL concludes with session five in which the focus is finding your unique excellence in preaching, led by Dr. Lori Carrell and may be supported by Dr. Michael Quicke and/or Dr. David Mains. This session also includes the final program evaluation and graduation celebration.

Two books are assigned as required reading for each session. These books are provided as a part of the program.

#### Outcomes:

Participants choose and set goals for outcomes they seek to realize. The 10 potential outcomes are:

1. A healthy, vital church producing spiritual and numerical growth through reaching out to the lost and sharing Christ.
2. A powerful vision and effective strategic plan to realize the vision.
3. Effective teams empowered to do ministry.
4. The ability to lead change successfully.
5. Strong personal spiritual growth.
6. A healthy family and ministry balance.
7. A high level of personal integrity.
8. Accountability relationships to maintain integrity and motivate action.
9. Fruitful mentoring relationships.
10. Improved physical health.

I will be part of the 4<sup>th</sup> class of CECL. As the other classes has emerged, here are some key areas of emphasis that the program has helped to develop.

#### **Key Area #1**

**Pastors' personal joy in ministry and life is renewed, their relationship with God and their families strengthened, and their potential for burnout reduced by 37%.** This emanates from the focus in the first session on personal integrity and the pastor's relationship with God, and through continuing to develop these themes throughout the program among the peer teams. Green Lake's setting powerfully rejuvenates pastors with a beautiful lake, enjoyable activities and wonderful Christian service.

#### **Key Area #2**

**CECL equips pastors to be effective in the 21st century.** Many of the CECL pastors have been able to make the transition from being a chaplain/shepherd only style of pastor, to being both a shepherd and a leader as a pastor, through the teaching and peer learning from CECL.

#### **Key Area #3**

**Church Lay Leadership Teams are formed at Green Lake to work with the pastor in discerning the vision and planning the implementation.** This is a critical component because a team is excited about implementing the vision, holds each other accountable and helps the pastor generate excitement and deal with roadblocks.

#### **Key Area #4**

**Churches become healthier through implementing outward focused visions to transform their community, led by the pastors and their leadership teams who attend CECL.**

#### **Key Area #5**

**Participation in peer team learning communities provides the support necessary to dispel isolation in ministry, with deep friendships forming which will last for lifetimes.** Through coaching and peer team relationships, encouragement and accountability is provided which is crucial to underpin change.

#### **Key Area #6**

**Pastors receive powerful feedback on how to improve their preaching.**

This is achieved in session five though peer teams doing guided critiques of pastor's sermon communication.

I look forward to traveling this journey of discernment and planning as we look to the future. This is a journey that God has called us to walk with him and with each other. May we be open to God's hand in our lives. May we know the blessings of God in the days to come.

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