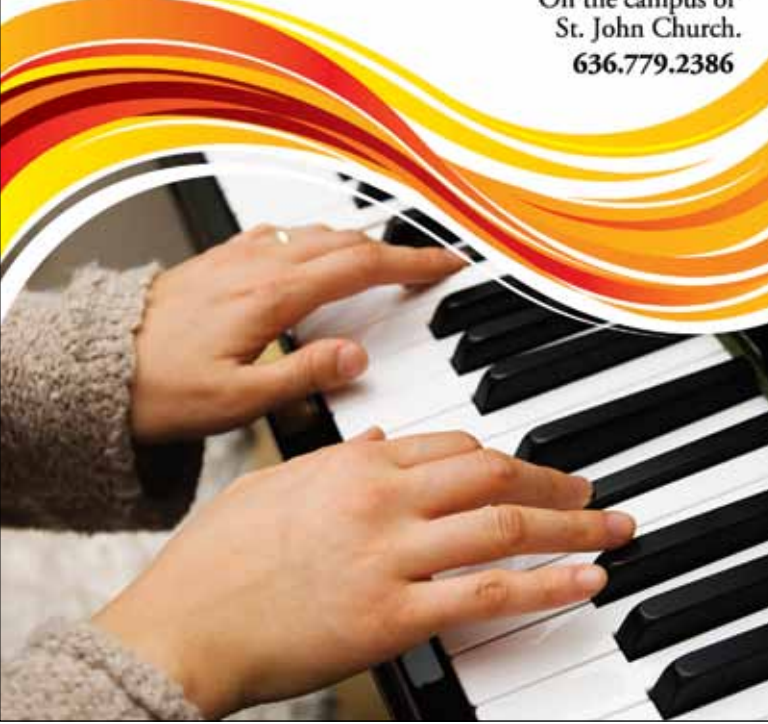


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# STATE OF THE CHURCH

A PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

by Stephen Hower

It was the theme song for the movie, Mahogany. Diana Ross played the lead role and sang the title song. The movie did well; the song did even better. "Do You Know?" was nominated for best original song and later covered by both Mariah Carey and Jennifer Lopez. It doesn't get much better than that!

*Do you know where you're going to?  
Do you like the things that life is showing you?  
Where are you going to?  
Do you know...?  
Did you get what you're hoping for  
When you look behind you  
There's no open doors  
What are you hoping for?  
Do you know...?*

Great lyrics. How can anyone know the future? Jesus once said, "About that—future—day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." If while on earth not even Jesus knew the day His Father has set for a future event, who am I to speculate? No, I subscribe to the theory, "If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your future plans."

I'm a student of the Apostle James' "school of prophecy," best summed up by the fourth chapter of the book bearing his name; "You do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. Your life is only a breath that appears for a while and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, 'If God wills, I will live and do this or do that.'"

On the opposite end of the "prophetic-spectrum" is the case of the unwise manager who made no effort to plan for the future. Upon the return of his master, he was strongly rebuked. "Why did you make no investment? You should have provided a return for all that I entrusted to your supervision." So... here I go, walking the tight-rope between sinful arrogance and sinful indifference! All I offer an "if-God-wills-perspective" on the present and future state of St. John congregation as our Senior Pastor.

## THE STATE OF STJ LEADERSHIP

A number of people are beginning to wonder about my tenure as Senior Pastor of St. John congregation. It has been the topic of conversation also among the Strategic Leaders in recent months. Let me respond by saying, "By God's grace, I plan to make the next five years the best five years of my leadership in this ministry. I just celebrated my 59th birthday and intend to continue in the role of Senior Leader until the age of 64—God-willing—at which time I think it would be wise to relinquish Senior Leadership to others while I am still available in a supportive role until retirement at age 65 or 66.

I think some of the confusion has come from my efforts to intentionally share leadership authority and visibility with the rest of the Strategic Team in Pastors Garrett and Peterson, and our Director of Operations, Mr. Jeff Cook. This has been a very intentional strategy for at least four reasons:

**1** How will new leaders grow if they are not given serious opportunity to lead? **2** Why would such gifted leaders stay if they were not significantly challenged? **3** In order for others to respect these men as leaders, people have to experience their leadership. **4** The next generation of Christians needs to know that their interests and values are being represented by people in their life-stage.

This is an intentional transition. It would dishonor the Lord's blessing and my years of service to watch the congregation grow older until I retired and then start over with younger leaders who would have to rebuild a ministry of relevance for the next generation.

In addition to a pending staffing transition, I should also announce our Strategic Leaders are initiating a very intentional training program for 60–80 lay leaders beginning in 2012. Six staff leaders have been selected to each mentor a dozen lay leaders, both men and women, to infuse the congregational ministry with Godly and gifted laity. These leaders will be recruited and trained through a carefully planned course of study, discussion and an expectation of personal engagement. That leadership training process will include both large and small group interaction with our staff but will also include an expectation of involvement in an area of ministry of each individual's choosing.

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### STATE OF OUR MISSION

Our mission has not changed. We still exist to... "Reach the lost and strengthen the saved to live bold and courageous lives of Christian witness before a nonbelieving world." While our mission is God-given and will never change, strategies do change. By God's grace we are intentionally working to become; **1** A community focused church **2** A church that empowers its people to discover, accept and live out their calling in their own life-circumstance—LIFEjourney **3** A church that recognizes the next generation as today's priority.

We are less programmatic and gathering, and more equipping, empowering and sending of our people out than in years past. We recognize that just inviting people to church is not the best way to reach the lost. St. John's members must engage in intentional Christian lifestyles as witnesses to others through the practice of 1.1.15.6 values.

### STATE OF WORSHIP

We are blessed beyond measure at St. John. Our people continue to offer their considerable talents to help us praise the Lord and edify God's people. We are blessed by some of the best Christian teachers and worship leaders in the country. Worship is always a dynamic experience at St. John. Few would argue differently. Worship changes have become the norm rather than the exception.

While cultural and traditional aspects of worship change to meet our ever-changing culture, some things will never change. We believe the Bible is the inerrant and inspired Word of God and it cannot be compromised, cannot be changed. We believe the gospel of Jesus Christ should be central to all teaching because it is only by grace we are saved, not works; it is His free gift. We attempt to maintain the proper tension between honoring God with praise while edifying God's people with sound teaching in all our services.

### STATE OF OUR FINANCES

God has been good to St. John despite these difficult financial times. St. John has finished the last two years with small operational balances due to the generous support of our people and careful monitoring of all spending. While income has actually faltered somewhat in recent years as our members lost jobs, lost commissions and lost investment income; our spending has also been sharply curtailed. We have not automatically rehired vacant positions. Intentional reorganization has resulted in reassignment of duties and streamlining of responsibilities. Some positions that we would liked to have filled, have remained vacant by necessity. In these difficult financial times, we feel this strategy is the responsible thing to do.

Our most recent Capital effort, *Launch*, has been faithfully supported by our members. To date 567 families have made commitments representing more than 1,300 people. The pledged support is over \$2.8 million for a three-year cycle. We have just completed the first year of receipts with more than \$1 million contributed in fulfillment of pledges. This

effort will ultimately make available \$570k to strengthen the base of current operations, especially in technology and website development. More than \$1.7 million is designated for debt reduction and another \$570k to support our mission partners in Cambodia and elsewhere.

Through a complex but financially sound financial strategy, designated gifts towards capital improvements have been invested to yield income to pay down the bonds that financed our expansions. It has been argued that St. John should continue that strategy in the near term, but others among us would like to see St. John use those currently invested funds, and the dollars designated for debt repayment from *Launch*, to pay off some bonds and reduce our total indebtedness from \$11 million to less than \$7 million in the next two years.

### AN EXCITING & DYNAMIC FUTURE

No one can know all that God has in mind for St. John in the days to come, but you can be sure that the present leadership is prayerfully seeking the Lord's will and faithful strategies to continue an aggressive effort to reach out with the saving gospel near and far.

Our intentions include the establishment of the separate 501(c)(3) Mission Society that will be available to receive funds and the involvement of people who are not active members of our congregation. We are still praying about ways we can also influence and help guide other ministries towards a shared strategy of growth that may include a mission plant or the establishment of an association of like-minded congregations who work together to revive and establish ministries of excellence.

Jesus said, "From everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom much has been entrusted, of him they will ask all the more." Not only has the Lord saved us, He has given us the great honor of enlisting our efforts to reach others who need His love and our help.



**Stephen Hower**

Executive Pastor  
shower@stjstl.net  
636.394.4100 ext.800

# 2011 Annual Report

**“We will be a community focused church.”**

Hopefully those words are beginning to sound more familiar to you, because becoming a community-focused church is one of our three strategic pillars at St. John. Recently, a new strategic division has been created to help make this a reality. Still, engaging our community church is not the work of a single division, it's happening throughout our entire church. Here's a sampling of what we mean.

- ▶ Our Easter Eggstravaganza brings hundreds of new people onto our campus every year for Easter. The Next Generation team spearheads that event each and every year. Vacation Bible School is another great example of a community event hosted by Next Gen ministries.
- ▶ In celebration for National Lutheran Schools Week, St. John School sent teams of kids out to community business asking them if they could serve them and also inviting them to a special chapel service.
- ▶ Pastoral care ministries are reaching increasing numbers of people who have no affiliation with St. John. Additionally, partnerships are being formed with other Christian churches and reputable parachurch agencies in our community to do what we do better.
- ▶ In September, we partnered with Metro West Fire Protection to put on a 9/11 remembrance service called “Resilience.” Not only did they join us for worship, but we helped raise support for Backstoppers on their behalf. We've not got a new relationship that we never had before.
- ▶ Countless new individuals families are coming in to St. John and beginning a LIFEjourney here through the front door of weekend worship. Many of whom have no church background at all or have been estranged from the church for a very long time.

Throughout this report, you'll see dozens of ways we are engaging our community in the regular ministry that happens on this campus. But even more than that, we're seeing more of our people engage the community totally outside of St. John, by “Living the Six” where God has planted them.

We are intentionally becoming a little less programmatic and gathering and becoming more equipping, empowering and sending of our people than in years past. We recognize that just inviting people to church is not enough to reach the lost. Our people must actively engage others in all the places they are already living life.

So you see, becoming a “community-focused church” is about a fundamental change in how we do life together, it's not a new to-do list or agenda. And by God's grace, it's happening in our midst.

## WORSHIP

2 venues, 3 styles of worship, 5 services each weekend. We're not complaining! With that amount of diversity, we believe we are meeting the needs of the multi-generational church that is St. John. It's one of the unique aspects that keeps St. John Church a vital and dynamic church. We're not willing to just sit back and let life happen. Instead, we embrace life and honor it through meeting the needs of our congregation. When our worship times and styles change, people become frustrated and some even leave. We are aware of those frustrations. But, we also know, that with prayer and patience, people in our community will find us—people who aren't attending a church or don't even know Jesus. We've shared stories with you in worship recently about some of these people. St. John is truly living out its mission statement of “..saving the lost and strengthening the saved...”

**ATTENDANCE** ↑ **16%**

**2,000** Average weekend attendance for Worship and Children's Ministry.

**86** **EIGHTY SIX**  
Number of people—staff and volunteers—needed to hold services each weekend.

**WEDDINGS** | Fifteen

**BAPTISMS** | 61 Infants, 10 Children/Youth, 2 Adults

**CONFIRMANDS** | Ninety Three

**FUNERALS** | Eighteen

## FINANCIALS

St. John is handling these uncertain economic times in a very positive and strategic way. While many ministries are suffering financially nationwide, God has blessed our shared ministry. Through staff realignment, wise use of resources and God's blessings, we have been able to reduce expenses without having a negative effect on our ministry outreach. Your support of this ministry continues to make an impact on the lives of people for Christ.

**Our October congregational meeting slides can be found at:**  
<http://www.stjstl.net/mediafiles/october2011.pdf>

**GENERAL FUND**  
**EXPENSE TRENDS** as of September 2011

**\$50,000** | Below budgeted expense

**\$40,000** | Earmarked for expenses later this fiscal year

**GIVING TRENDS** as of September 2011

**\$6,000** | Below budgeted giving

**ST. JOHN LUTHERAN SCHOOL**

**\$75,000** | Surplus at the end of June 2011

**\$43,000** | Ahead of budget mid-October 2011

# CARE MINISTRIES

St. John members, after going through a Care Ministry program, are realizing the positive benefits to their emotional, financial, and spiritual growth. As a result, we have more people stepping up and stepping out to lead and facilitate the programs in this area. But our Care Ministry programs go beyond just caring for our own members needs. Daily, we are meeting the needs of both our members and those in the community. In fact, it is a witness of Christ's love to the community.

## STRENGTHENING MARRIAGES

**178** | people strengthened their marriages in *The Art of Marriage* classes.

**17** | couples prepared for marriage in the *For Better and Forever* premarital seminar.

“The best marriage workshop I've ever attended!”

“Life changing!”

“Great event! Engaging!”

## STRENGTHENING FINANCES

### FINANCIAL PEACE UNIVERSITY

**50%** → → of participants took the class to pay down debt.

**50%** → → of participants took the class to learn better money management skills.

💡 **During the 13-week FPU class, the average family:**

- ➔ pays off \$5,300 in debt
- ➔ saves \$2,700

## When Times Are Tough...

**We provide Support for Caregivers and the Sick**

**30** people completed *Passages in Caregiving*

**76** people participated in *The Journey of Hope*

**304** Care visits and rides for the homebound by *LaVisTe*

**575** hospital and homebound visits by our pastoral staff

**We provide Support for Hurting People**

**14** people have received support and guidance in *DivorceCare*

**15** people have completed *GriefShare* and have a new sense of hope

**3** needy families have been served by our *Christ in Action* program

**35** people looking for work have received guidance in *Everything You Need to Know to Land A Job*

“I could never have done this all by myself. Who ever heard of a congregation helping someone in this way”

—Christ in Action recipient

The percentage of individuals participating in Care Ministry programming who are from the outside community.

**75%** | *DivorceCare*

**25%** | *GriefShare*

**75%** | *Unemployed Seminars*

**60%** | *Cancer Treatment Centers of America Seminar*

**80%** | needy people requesting help from congregation

# NEXT GENERATION AND LIFEJOURNEY

**FAMILYLIVE!** | Average Attendance | Jan–Sept  
 '09 | 218 | '10 | 234 | '11 | 259

FamilyLIVE! began in 2009 with the vision of being a great opportunity to meld the VBS experience with a multi-generational worship experience. In a little more than two years, it has become all that and even more! In fact, FamilyLIVE! is one of the best year-round inviting opportunities for families with children. Each month we see new families experiencing this unique style of worship. It's become a great front door experience for families looking for an inviting and encouraging worship experience.

**ST. JOHN SCHOOL** | Enrollment  
 '09 | 429 | '10 | 496 | '11 | 520  
 -2010 | -2011 | -2012

## VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

**PandaMania '11**  
 615 volunteers attendance  
 1,028 attendance at VBS Live

**Extreme VBS**  
 '09 | 218  
 '10 | 260  
 '11 | 327  
 } Number of middle school and high school participants

## LIFEjourney

Adult Small Group Participants

Sept '10 | 422 | Sept '11 | 550 → +23%

IronMen Participants

Sept '10 | 149 | Sept '11 | 178 → +16%

Growing Deeper Bible Study

725 printed each sermon series

## CORNERSTONE YOUTH MINISTRIES

Cornerstone Youth Ministries  
**PLUS** = **STRONG PARTNER-SHIP**  
 Rockwood School District

We are part of the Rockwood Drug-Free Coalition. Various “Can’t Miss” events are shared openly with Rockwood students because Cornerstone is a safe, drug-free environment.

## & BENEFIT BREAKFAST & PANCAKE THROWDOWN

**\$45 THOUSAND!**  
 Raised for Cornerstone Youth Ministries



Pancakes and Bacon generously donated by *The Original Pancake House*

# MISSIONS

Being on mission at St. John is more than just being on a mission trip. In fact, it's something you can do every day! When you're living a life on mission, you'll find yourself taken beyond simply "doing" into seeing all of life differently.

That starts with seeing yourself differently, not as a person who is on the planet to live a good life and to maximize enjoyment, but as a person who has been intentionally placed in a neighborhood, a workplace, a school and within relationships to carry out Christ's great agenda for the world that He loves.

So, whether you are packing your bags for world-wide travel or packing groceries to bring back for a food drive, you are on mission at St. John.

## CAMBODIA TRIP

In April, a team from St. John travelled to Cambodia to help conduct a youth conference. Our theme was "born of God" and we taught on baptism. Two months later, Pastor Funghatou Lo, our missionary partner, travelled to a remote and extremely impoverished region called Ratanakiri to do follow up. During his visit 26 people in the village decided to be baptized, many of them were youth from the conference! Several youth even chose to wear their official youth conference t-shirt as they received Christ in baptism! It's an amazing privilege to be helping people begin a LIFEjourney with God not only here in West St. Louis County, but also half-way around the world!

## BELIZE TRIP

St. John has been travelling to Belize for nine years now. In one of our early visits we came in contact with a young man by the name of Dominique who was attending one of our VBS events. Dominique's whole family was basically irreligious, caught up in a vague and superstitious mix of Catholicism and voodoo. Over the years, not only has Dominique received Christ, but his mother and siblings have as well. His mother is now one of our strongest partners in Belize and Dominique is beginning to participate in ministry for other kids in his community. He recently wrote, "The St. John missionaries have been the best thing that could have come and have greatly influenced the people in my community...they have been nothing but an absolute life changer!" We've seen God use children to reach entire families in West County for quite a while; God continues to amaze us as he uses us to do that in Belize.

## NEAR & FAR

2010-2011 Mission Trips Participants



- Seine Bight, Belize—65
- Cambodia—14
- Joplin, Missouri—30
- Wind River Indian Reservation—10
- Boonville, Missouri—14
- Chitina/Tanacross, Alaska—10
- Poland—2

## COLLECTIONS!

Impacting our Community, State, and the World

**1600**

Joy with a Toy presents

**3** Crates of art supplies for Art Heals-Joplin, MO

**310** School Supply Backpacks

**350** Baby items

**5** Van loads of food for Circle of Concern

**815**

Thanksgiving and Christmas 2010 and Easter 2011 dinners provided

**10,000** Pairs of shoes for The Shoeman Project

**3,600** Bags of food for Kids Against Hunger that will provide 21,600 meals to people in Africa

## 700+ Volunteers

- Imagine Academy Tutors
- Holiday Meal Distribution
- Christmas Parties
- School Backpack Distribution
- Get Out Day
- July 4th Celebration
- VBS with Humanitri
- Habitat for Humanity
- College Hill building rehab projects
- ESL Classes
- Sunshine Ministries Mission
- Meramec Bluffs Senior Center

## IMPACT FUND SPENDING

The last Sunday of each month, we take up a special collection to support the Impact Fund to help do the work "outside the walls." 100% of the contributions to this fund go directly to support this work. From local mission work in College Hill, to the dental and medical clinics in Belize, you are helping to change the world.

