

## **Emmaus Baptist Church — State of the Church Address**

### **Sunday, December 6, 2020**

#### **1. The Crossroads**

For the past couple of years, I've begun our State of the Church address with a framework developed by Thom Rainer to explain a pastor's timeline at a church. Rainer labels Year 1 as Honeymoon, with the fresh expectations and joy of a new relationship. Then, at some point during that year (maybe week 1), the church begins to see the imperfections in the pastor's ministry (and becomes less afraid to point these out to him), and the pastor finds out some promises from the congregation--especially promises of change--were unfulfilled.

Years 2 and 3 can bring Conflicts and Challenges. As Rainer notes, "During the second and third year, the church gains a number of new members who arrived under the present pastor's tenure. It's not uncommon for longer-term members, especially those in positions of influence or volunteer roles, to feel threatened or frustrated by the changes as new people move into the core of the church. After a long-term pastorate, the next pastor often doesn't last long because, just as it's difficult for new members to break into an established situation, it's equally hard for a new pastor to break into well-established networks." Years 2 and 3, for us, had hard moments, but you all were incredibly patient and kind.

Rainer goes on to call Years 4 and 5 'The Crossroads, Part 1.' He says, "If the pastor and the church manage [this season] well, they can often look forward to some of the best years ahead." In fact, Rainer names Years 6-10 the 'Fruit and Harvest' period.

I just finished Year 5 at Emmaus. And, even though his observations are general, Rainer's framework has proven accurate and helpful. By this point, we know each other's flaws. But, by this point, we have also built some trust and have a clearer vision of what is possible in the years to come. This past year, the word that has come to mind most consistently when I think of Emmaus is "anticipation." I live with anticipation -- and pray with anticipation -- about what lies in front of us, even knowing there will continue to be challenges and difficulties to navigate. So tonight, as we look forward, we are also going to look back at the past few months and years. We'll evaluate where we've been, where we are, and where we sense God is leading us.

#### **2. 2020...Need I Say More**

When I think back on 2020, I'll think about Deacons and the OKC Thunder. That's a good combination by the way! Why these two things? On Wednesday night, March 11th, the Thunder game was cancelled before it started following a positive coronavirus test from Utah Jazz player Rudy Gobert. I heard this news walking into an Emmaus Deacons' Meeting, and by the time we finished that meeting, our world around here was changed, in some sense, forever. The impacts had certainly started outside our area before March 11 (even though my churchwide email on March 10th didn't even mention the virus), but things began to move very quickly after that night.

## 2.1 Overview of the Year

The next day I sent a general email to the church family, and we created a staff email thread to share perspectives and ideas. It's interesting to go back and read those emails because from the earliest days of this pandemic, you can see the incredible teamwork displayed by our staff. I can't say enough how well the Emmaus staff has performed this year -- sharing ideas, making adjustments on the fly, communicating with our church members, and adapting ministry efforts to serve the body of Christ.

One week after that Thunder Game and Deacons' Meeting, our staff met on Wed, March 18, to make some key decisions. We prayed together and shared concerns. But we also took key steps forward. In that meeting, we decided to move completely online, close the building for a few weeks, and find ways to stay in touch with the church. We created a spreadsheet of every Emmaus member, divided the names among our staff, and began calling through the list. Our Audio-Visual Team (led by Roger Kilgore) worked that week to set up additional cameras and transition us completely online by Sunday, March 22nd.

One key idea from that March 18th staff meeting was from Crystal Hillis, who mentioned we could ask church members to submit videos each week saying Hi from home. Crystal's idea is how we ended up seeing Dale McCoy wearing a bonnet hat. I've been urged to find a way to include elements like these videos even now that we're meeting together in-person again, and I couldn't agree more. This will be a major commitment going forward.

Another thing that came from the March 18th staff meeting was a commitment to provide daily Facebook Live videos from the staff. These videos ran through the Summer and allowed us to provide mission updates, funny jokes from Ms Courtney and Ms Amy, introductions to other pastors in the area, and Bible devotions. Beginning on May 31st, we were able to offer in-person gatherings again. Over the Summer, a few groups began to meet, but we unfortunately had to cancel Falls Creek, Kids' Camp, VBS, and mission trips. By early August, though, our kids were able to come back into classrooms, and we moved pretty well through the Fall before the recent wave of cases led to more cancellations.

If you're curious about numbers for the past year, here's a quick overview.

- Through January and February, we were averaging 575 people in the worship gathering and 643 total on Sunday mornings, including preschool and kids. This was ahead of 2019's average attendance.
- For March 22nd through May 24th, we averaged 268 views (which could mean families or individuals) online with Facebook and YouTube, with a high of 331 on Easter.
- For May 31st (when we began to regather in two services) through Aug 9th, we averaged 309 people in attendance on Sunday mornings (with about  $\frac{1}{3}$  in the first service and  $\frac{2}{3}$  in the second); and during this time, our online views averaged 67.
- On August 16th, we restarted preschool and kid programs on Sunday morning. Since then, the in-person worship gatherings have averaged a total of 442, with an average of 82 at 9:15am and 360 at 10:45. During this time, the online views continued to average 56 each week.

## 2.2 Celebration Stories

To state the obvious, numbers don't tell the whole story this year. So, over the next few minutes, I want to celebrate how God has been at work. In a sermon at the beginning of our Spring quarantine, I mentioned that our building might be closed, but the church is still open for business. This proved true -- even without access to a building, the people of God were able to proclaim and display Jesus in some powerful ways.

### Communications / Online

Gwen mentioned that the engagement on our Facebook page is up 166% from last year. Back around Easter, we used this increased engagement to ask Emmaus members to share their testimony on Facebook. So many of you did this, and I heard great feedback! One member posted her testimony and a lady whom her family has been praying for -- this lady is a Wiccan and the family has been praying for her for over 20 years -- watched the post and "loved" it.

### Preschool

Our weekday preschool - Compass - is in its 4th year; and with great flexibility, those teachers have been able to provide 65 kiddos with a semi-normal school experience. We have 5 classes, ages 2 through kindergarten, and are full in nearly every class, including a new class that opened this year. On top of this, we are now seeing families bring their second and third kids to school at Compass.

### Children

In some ways, our kids -- between school changes and church event cancellations -- have been impacted by the past year more than anyone. But, we've also heard of our kids reaching out to their neighbors back in the Spring and then bringing these friends to church later in the year. After the decision was made to cancel VBS, one volunteer mentioned: "God still wanted us to train and prep for VBS, because He wanted us to remember how important it is to teach the Gospel to kids. We stay obedient as long as He asks us to, and then we release the rest to His hands." As Courtney said, "This was just a reminder that no matter how this year has gone, no matter how many plans have changed, what's important is being faithful to what God has called us to today, and then tomorrow, and then the next day."

### Students

As with kids, our teenagers have felt the emotional and social impact of COVID. But, even though they have missed out on some events, our students were among the first groups reconnecting online and finding ways to get together during the week. I think we also learned some important lessons from our students during the past year. Even though their generation has been raised online and understands technology, they strongly sense the importance of relationships and making a difference in the world. Instead of feeling frustrated or worried about Generation Z, I think we've seen signs that they are ready to engage powerfully and personally with the church and with God's mission in the world for years to come.

### Adult Ministry

Our Sunday School classes and small groups did a great job loving and caring for each other during the quarantine. Despite all of the difficulties, our groups found ways to stay in touch through Zoom, texts, prayer, parking lot meetings, etc. Then, when we regathered in late Summer, not only were some classes able to get back together, but we had great participation in our new Wednesday night groups. One of these Wednesday groups was for our Young Adults, and this group was instrumental in leading to the baptisms you saw in our worship service on November 22nd.

### Music and Preaching

During the Spring, David and Jeron consistently put out songs on Facebook during the week for our church family. Not only this, but David was able to rotate most members of the vocal team to help lead worship online on Sunday mornings. And, when the time was right, we were able to pull the orchestra and choir back into the rotation. In the Spring, we finished a 15-month sermon series through the Gospel of Matthew. Then, we studied God's character, before working our way through Galatians with a focus on the power of the Gospel. Here at the end of the year, we're trying to draw all those pieces together by considering the Gift of Limits provided by our Unlimited God. As we move into 2021, we'll study the Fruit of the Spirit then move toward extended study of an Old Testament book (probably Daniel, but still up in the air).

### Finances / Missions

When COVID reached our area in March, we wondered how the uncertainty would impact our financial resources as a church. In fact, our giving has remained incredibly strong for 2020, and we are on track for a significant budget surplus for the year that will allow us to give extra to some of our mission partnerships and save toward future projects. As we move ahead, there is a sense that the full economic impact of COVID may still be coming. Jim, Jonathan, and our Finance Committee are keeping a close eye on this, and we simply want to remain good stewards of what God has provided.

I included "missions" under this heading because our strong financial position allowed us to respond as needs arose during the year, including the October ice storm that was completely on-brand for 2020. Jim could tell you so many stories about mission work this year. In one story, an Emmaus couple met a homeless man at Central Park in Moore. Jim was able to get him emergency shelter through Salvation Army, then we were able to help him find a job with a former Emmaus member. This man is now living in Moore and has connected with our church several times. In another story, one of our police officers at Emmaus met a gentleman who was homeless. Another police officer used connections with his TikTok followers to raise money for a car. Chief Todd Gibson connected him to a job; and as a Vet, this man was able to get immediate housing through Goodwill at an apartment we connect with each year through the Christmas meal bags (and an Emmaus family has provided furniture for the apartment). When local media reported about this story on TV, the Police Officer who helped raise funds for the car was able to receive much-deserved attention, while the Emmaus van was literally in the background of the video. I think this is symbolic of how God has used Emmaus over the years to serve in our community, from involvement with the school system and police department, to our support of Hope is Alive, Moore Faith Medical Clinic, and the Food Bank.

### **3. What Won't Change**

Tomorrow (Mon, Dec 7th) will mark 34 years since Emmaus was incorporated as a church. Even with all that's changed this past year -- and before we look to the future and discuss some upcoming plans and changes -- I want to mention a few things that won't change.

#### *3.1 Church Verse - 2 Corinthians 4:5*

Our church verse is 2 Corinthians 4:5 - "What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." We say this verse together when introducing new members to the church, and it serves as the foundation for our church's mission statement. Our commitment to God's Word and to the foundational principles of this verse won't change.

#### *3.2 We exist to Proclaim and Display Jesus*

Based on 2 Corinthians 4:5, we exist as a church to proclaim and display Jesus.

- "We exist" = church is about 'we, not me'
- "To Proclaim" = what we say
- "And" = we want our words and actions to match; both are important
- "Display" = what we do
- "Jesus" = the ultimate focus of our lives and church

#### *3.3 UP -- IN -- OUT*

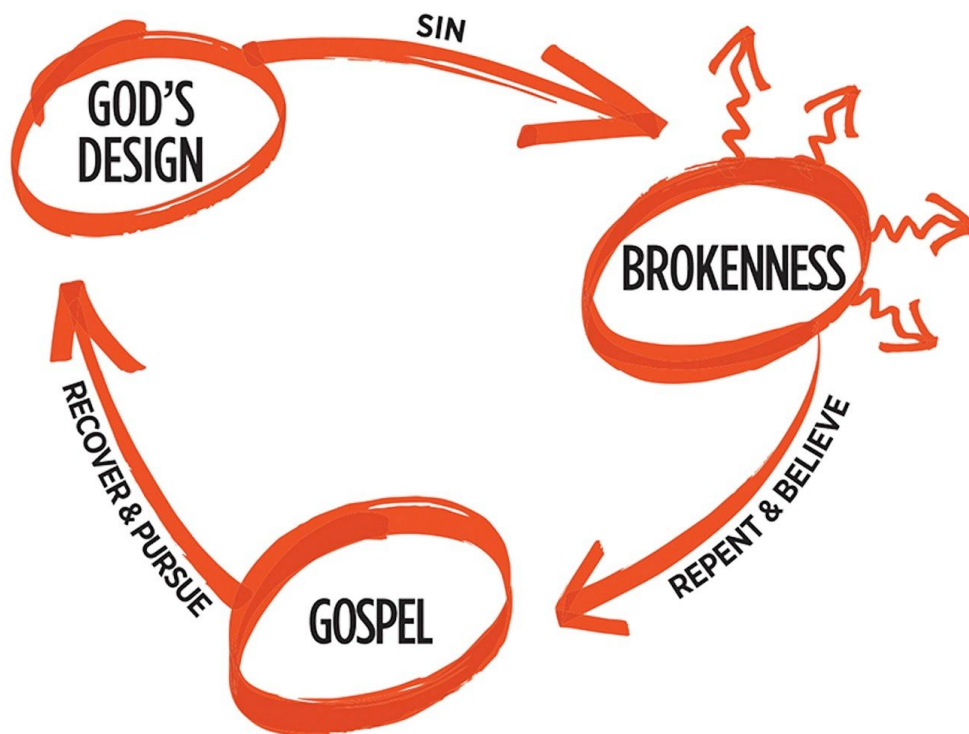
- UP (Worship)
  - Focusing your heart and mind on God
  - Prayer and Praise (both individually and with others)
  - The Sunday worship gathering prepares us to worship God throughout the week, and the gathering is also a celebration of God's work in our lives during the past week.
- IN (Discipleship)
  - We don't want to look religious on the outside while feeling empty on the inside. We believe in the power of God's Word and God's Spirit working together.
  - In My Heart
  - In My Home
  - In My Church
    - Encouraging Others
    - Being Part of a Group (Sunday School Class; Small Group)
    - Serving others by using spiritual gifts and talents
- OUT (Missions)
  - What happens on the inside should come out! We live from the inside out.
  - Giving (money; time; resources; sharing the love of God with others)

- Going (personally; with the church; partnering with other churches)
  - Neighborhoods
    - Proclaiming and Displaying Jesus locally
    - Live, Learn, Work, Play
  - Nations
    - Proclaiming and Displaying Jesus globally
    - Church Trips and Partnerships
    - North American and International Mission Boards
    - Serving those of other nations who live in our neighborhoods

### 3.4. The 3 Circles

As we train members for evangelism and help people understand the big picture of the Bible, we've found the 3 Circles model to be very helpful. As people move away from God's Design for their life and for His world, we see the effects of Sin and Brokenness (with Brokenness leading to death). I often say there are 2 problems none of us can fix on our own -- sin and death. But Jesus has dealt with both of these through the Cross and Resurrection. As we repent of sin and believe in Jesus, we are not only forgiven of sin and have eternal hope beyond death, but God's Spirit uses the Gospel message to help us recover and pursue God's design for life right now.

We will continue to teach this model, not as equivalent to Scripture, but as a helpful tool to know and share the Gospel and the overall story of God's Word. And, if there's a tool you like better (EvangeCube, 4 Spiritual Laws, Bridge Illustration, etc), use that one!



## **4. Moving Forward**

In last year's State of the Church, I mentioned four categories (Programming, People Groups, Property, and Personnel) that we use for long-range planning. Under each heading, I listed some things we hoped to pursue in 2020. I want to review those now as a way to look toward the future.

### *4.1 Programming - Two Services / Technology*

Last year, I mentioned, "Our key decision for programming in 2020 isn't about one specific program, but it impacts all programming because we need to decide whether or not to remain in only one Sunday morning worship service." Then, I laid out a couple of reasons to consider two services. Missing in the list of reasons was a global pandemic that limited seating capacity in your building!

When we re-gathered this past Summer, we provided two services to promote social distancing and help with the transition. For the time being, we will stick with this plan. No decisions have been made long-term about when, or if, to return to one service. However, alongside decisions about two services, we need to consider the impact of technology on church ministry in the years ahead. One big question circulating among pastors right now is about the impact of COVID on future church attendance patterns. To what degree can churches continue connecting with families online, without losing focus on in-person services and programs? Certainly, the answer will be a hybrid of online and in-person; and I'd ask for your prayer and help as we seek to maintain our focus on personal, pastoral ministry, even as we learn to utilize technology better in the years to come.

### *4.2 People Groups - Hurting and Homeless*

What we mean by people groups is simply those people with whom God has given us favor and connections. It's another way of saying — where should we invest missions money and ministry teams both here and around the world?

We went into 2020 hoping to provide a Missions Celebration in August that would allow us to bring in our missionary partners from around the world. Plus, we mentioned open doors for connecting with families whose heart language isn't English. We have been able to remain connected to our mission partners and our community this past year, but neither option progressed how we planned.

However, God did allow us to be on the frontlines of addressing the rapidly growing homeless population in our area, and He allowed this to happen through strengthened connections with the Moore Police Department and local non-profits. For several years, Jim has sensed that needs previously located outside our community might come closer. In 2020, this has happened, and Emmaus is well-positioned to minister to our city in the years to come. Each year, we want to have open eyes, hearts, and hands toward the people with whom God gives us favor and connections.

### *4.3 Property - Campus Master Plan*

Our key property goal for 2020 was the establishment of a campus master plan, with particular attention on a new preschool/children's building. The quarantine set back that process a few months, but I'm glad to report the architects are currently working on the master plan document. They just completed survey work, and we hope to have some proposals from them by March.

In light of this year, we obviously want to be careful about starting a new building project. However, we don't want to be passive either. By developing a master plan and building a strong financial foundation, we will be better positioned to move ahead when the time is right. A key reason that First Baptist planted Emmaus in the 1980s was to reach the neighborhoods they hoped would grow up around this area. In many ways, their vision of neighborhood growth has come to fruition, and we want to make sure we don't miss out on a chance to minister effectively to families in our area.

Another part of the master plan -- and likely the step we'll pursue first -- is further development of our west property. We already have good savings in this account, and there are several possible projects we can pursue. We hope to build a very nice pavilion that can be used for Sunday School parties, family reunions, and birthday parties. We will also level some of the ground closest to the parking lot and improve drainage, which will allow more groups to use the field for t-ball and soccer practice (and for our guys to continue their flag football league). We plan to add a disc golf course, and a big goal -- though we'll have to watch finances -- is to make a prayer walking trail around the field that people can use for exercise and fellowship.

### *4.4 Personnel - Music*

Section 5.1 of last year's State of the Church address began, "Our primary goal in 2020 for personnel is to solidify the music leadership position so we no longer need to operate in limbo."

It's worth mentioning that the Bible also says in Proverbs 16:9, "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps."

Going into 2020, we couldn't anticipate how a pandemic would lead to missing several months of meetings. Nevertheless, we have continued this process, and tonight I am very excited to make a proposal to you. The proposal is that Jeron Young transition from his role as Student Minister to the role of Worship Pastor and also serve as our Minister of Senior Adults.<sup>1</sup>

Over the next few minutes, I want to share how we reached this proposal and why I'm so excited about it.

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<sup>1</sup> This also means that if the church votes favorably in a few weeks on tonight's proposal, we would immediately begin a search for the next Emmaus Student Minister, working alongside the Personnel Committee with input from a group of Emmaus students, parents, and volunteers.



First, a little background, especially if you're new to Emmaus and didn't even realize this was something we have been working on. In 2009, David Hillis was hired as the Music Associate. In 2012, the Music Minister at the time resigned, and the church asked David to serve as Interim Music Minister. Following this, Emmaus formed a Music Search Committee; and this committee offered the position to an outside candidate, but the candidate backed out at the last minute. Not long afterwards, the Emmaus Pastor at the time resigned, and the Music Search Committee was temporarily disbanded. From this point of pastoral resignation to my family coming in November 2015 was another 20 months or so.

When I first arrived at Emmaus, people understandably began asking when we were going to hire a music minister. In talking with older pastors in the area who have mentored me, these pastors urged me to move slowly with the process (I'm not sure they had 5 years in mind!) and get to know the church before making a decision. After about a year and a half, I took steps to begin the music search; but soon afterwards, we made some other changes that resulted in several families leaving. To be completely honest, it took me a long time to recover from that experience. I mentally set aside the music process, and then, in 2019, felt it was time to move ahead.

Potentially lost in that timeline is the remarkable way David has served our church over the past decade. When we think about David's leadership, it's easy to go immediately to his amazing voice and musical skill. But what's been even more impressive is how he is so faithful and prepared every week. He has humbly served and gone far above and beyond the role of an Interim Music Minister. None of us -- other than his wife -- will know the number of hours he has put in behind the scenes, and we've been blessed by his humility, wisdom, and love for the Lord. David's comment along the way -- when I would check in with him, asking if he was still good serving as interim -- was that he simply wanted to do what was best for the church. Scripture says to give honor to whom honor is due, and as Jim has mentioned several times, one of our biggest goals is wanting to honor and appreciate David in a way that ultimately brings glory to God.

To put the full situation in context, let me backup for a minute and explain more of the process that led to our proposal tonight. In May 2017, the Emmaus Pastors at the time (myself, Jim, and Jeron) were meeting for prayer and to discuss God's work in the church (this was before we set aside the search process for a while). We have these meetings every 6 weeks or so, specifically as a way to be obedient to Hebrews 13:17 which talks about leaders keeping watch over the souls of their people. In this meeting, as I was sharing that I wanted to work on the music search process and as I shared some things that would be important when looking at candidates, Jim asked Jeron if he had ever considered a calling to this type of ministry. Best I can remember, Jim and I had never talked about this separately, but his comment was something I had thought about as well. In response to Jim's comment, Jeron shared about his love for worship ministry and that Jim's comment made him want to pray about the possibility, but it wasn't something he had considered much before that point.

As I said earlier, in 2019 the Emmaus Pastors (myself, Jim, Jeron, and Jeff) restarted conversations about solidifying the music leadership position; then in early 2020, we began receiving resumes for

the position. I want to explain this process because it might be a little different than what you've experienced. Section 8.2.2 of our By-Laws states, "Whenever the need arises for a new Member of the Ministry Staff—either through vacancy or through the establishment of a new position—the Pastor, existing members of the Ministry Staff, and the Personnel Committee shall work together to recommend a person for such position. A Search Committee shall only be organized if deemed necessary by the Pastor or Personnel Committee."

In talking with the Pastor Search Committee over 5 years ago, one thing that was important to me, and that they affirmed, was the pastor's involvement in identifying a worship pastor. Emmaus has a very helpful structure in this regard. The church trusts and expects the pastors and ministry staff to make decisions and take leadership. At the same time, the church has a few committees -- Personnel, Finance, Building -- to provide checks-and-balance and serve as a sounding board for the staff. In saying this, I want to be clear that -- for the current process -- we didn't form a Music Search Committee outside of the Personnel Committee, and I've taken more of a leadership role in this search process than I might in other situations. But, based on the number of meetings we've had and the number of hard questions they've thrown at me, the Personnel Committee has in no way been passive. Instead, they've been a great source of wisdom and feedback and forced me to move carefully through the final stages of this process. This proposal comes with their unanimous vote.

When it came time to pursue music resumes last year, we didn't put an announcement on the back page of the Baptist Messenger or hire an outside search agency. Both of those strategies can garner a lot of resumes, but both strategies tend to produce an overload of applicants that can detract from pursuing candidates who match the character and heart of your church. Instead, Jim and I reached out to multiple organizations, pastors, and leaders we respect to ask them for candidates. We also had separate meetings with a few key worship leaders in significant churches, including Charlie Hall at Frontline Church and Brian Taylor at Prestonwood Church in the Dallas area. These leaders helped us think through key issues about worship ministry and how to pursue candidates. This process led to 10 strong candidates, among whom were David and Jeron.<sup>2</sup>

When I think about moving from initial conversations to tonight's proposal, I'd describe the process as a spiral. Amanda and I often use this spiral illustration in marriage, with the idea being that you feel like you're talking in a circle about an issue and not making much progress; when in reality, as you go around the circle and see all sides of an issue, you're getting closer to the center.

If you've ever been to the Emmaus offices during the week, you've probably heard singing in the hallway. Surprisingly enough, that's not me -- it's Jeron. He sings in the hallway, in the car, at staff meetings, and likely in the shower. And if you've been part of an Emmaus worship gathering before, you know Jeron's love for worshipping the Lord with his church family. What you see on stage is not

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<sup>2</sup> Jeron submitted his resume in March (just before COVID quarantine started) after Jim and I approached him again. At a Pastors' Meeting in early April to discuss COVID response, the music leadership discussion came up again. We removed Jeron from all future meetings about the music search in an effort to protect the process and guard his relationships with everyone involved.

for show or personal attention; he loves to sing and worship and wants to lead others to do the same. This comes from a heart of humility and also comes from someone who wants to see his family worship the Lord in their home. When Jeron and I have talked about worship ministry, he has mentioned that what we do on Sundays should prepare and shape how people worship the Lord in the home, behind closed doors. He loves his wife and kids deeply; and as excited as Jeron is about the possibility of leading worship at Emmaus, Kristine is doubly excited for him because of what she has discerned in his life for many years.

For almost 20 years, Jeron has served full-time at Emmaus. He actually began in 1996 as a student ministry intern under Michael Staton. While in the Emmaus youth group, Jeron began playing the guitar (a gift from his grandfather) and leading his peers in worship. After a few internships, Jeron began part-time with our college and singles in 1999, before moving to full-time in 2001. During his time at Emmaus, Jeron has been part of the worship ministry at various points; and in 2002, he was one of the interim worship leaders during a music search process. Plus, once he transitioned to Student Minister in 2006, Jeron has consistently led worship for and alongside our students.

Before I lay out some of the vision for Jeron's potential role in worship ministry, let me say something about the Senior Adult Minister part of this proposal. When we hired Carl Dean in 2018 to lead Senior Adults and Evangelism, we had no idea how impactful his hire would be. Carl immediately became a gift, not only to our senior adults, but also to our staff. He consistently checked on and encouraged our senior adults, and he helped us be more intentional about evangelism. When Carl stepped away from the Emmaus staff to become the new Executive Director of Mission Norman, I knew I wanted to find someone who would love and serve our senior adults as much as Carl did.

As I began to consider Jeron's possible calling to lead worship, he also immediately fit what we needed for our older adults. Few youth ministers that I know have done a better job connecting across the generations of a church. Jeron has not only ministered to our teenagers and their families, but he's tried to connect the teenagers with our older adults. Plus, after being here for so many years, he knows and loves the older adults at Emmaus, and they know and love him. It's not hard to envision Jeron doing woodworking jobs with some of our older men, taking his boys to visit shut-ins, or Kristine writing cards and making phone calls to our older ladies. To take a section out of Jeron's application questionnaire, after identifying encouragement as his primary spiritual gift, he wrote, "Coming alongside hurting souls in the midst of struggle has probably been the most life giving thing I have enjoyed in ministry while using these gifts. The nature of leading ministry also gives me the opportunity to invest in those who serve under my leadership."

Circling back to music for a minute, I'm excited about his vision for pastoral leadership, team building, and service planning. As with anyone who is hired to a church staff, we don't expect him to be a mirror-image of those who held this position in the past. He will bring his own skills, personality, and approach; but what won't change is a humble approach that honors the Lord and seeks to serve the church. Jeron wants to build up musicians and worship leaders around him who will each use their gifts to engage and lead the congregation in gathered worship. On this note, Jeron and I have talked

about a desire to maintain our church's choir. Since Jeron doesn't have training in musical theory or chorale music, one of his first tasks will be identifying a part-time leader for our choir who can also work alongside Jeron with our instrumentalists and vocalists.<sup>3</sup>

As part of the Emmaus staff, Jeron's strongest quality is probably his teachable spirit and desire for feedback. Jeron and I have developed a relationship that allows for hard conversations and disagreements, but that includes a strong trust in one another and a desire to speak the truth in love. He is able to share his ideas but also work alongside a team in a humble, spiritually mature way. This approach will lead him to learn from other worship pastors in our area and from resources at conferences around the country.

To me, the possibility that the Lord is leading Jeron to serve as our Worship Pastor fits within the big picture of what we've talked about tonight -- especially our structure of UP, IN, and OUT. A key (and on-going) part of leadership in any organization is getting the right people on the bus and then getting them in the right seats on the bus. It's an imperfect process and requires the Lord's wisdom and patience with us. But, with the hiring of a Worship Pastor, we will have pastoral leadership in place to serve each part of our church's vision and mission:

- **“We exist to Proclaim and Display Jesus”** - *Owen* - Responsible for preaching and overall vision. Provides oversight for the full staff, including direct reports from Preschool, Kids, Youth, and the UP / IN / OUT pastors. Responsible for connecting with guests and prospects through personal follow-up and also through our Communications Director and Welcome Team.
- **“UP”** - *Jeron (proposed)* - Responsible for Worship through weekly gatherings, leading our church in prayer and praise, both when we gather on Sundays and in our homes. Connects the church across generations, with special attention to our Senior Adults.
- **“IN”** - *Jeff* - Responsible for Discipleship through Sunday School, small groups, and ministry teams (Men, Women, College/Singles); also responsible for our Membership Process and New Members. Leading the church to engage with God's Word and encourage/serve one another.
- **“OUT”** - *Jim* - Responsible for Missions in our Neighborhoods and to the Nations. Leads our church in outreach and evangelism. Also, serves as the Associate Pastor with responsibility for the Financial Administrator, building usage and staff, and working alongside the Deacons. (And this description of Jim's role is the greatest understatement in history!)

So, with that proposal in mind, what are the next steps beyond tonight?

First, I know this is a lot of information to digest. A copy of tonight's address will be available on our website and emailed as part of my regular, church wide email. Plus, a hard copy of tonight's address will be mailed to every member of Emmaus.

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<sup>3</sup> A likely question at this point would be, “Why not David for this part-time choir and associate position?” This was my hope, and we asked David to consider the option; but after several meetings and much prayer on his part, he didn't feel it was the right thing for him to do. While I had hoped this plan would work out, we completely respect his decision.

Because this time of prayerful consideration is happening amid COVID and over the holidays, I want to be particularly careful that our church family has a chance to ask questions. Over the next few weeks, we will offer question-and-answer forums, including an online, Zoom option. For the in-person options, we will meet in a room large enough to socially distance. As always, you can email me directly at [owen@emmausokc.org](mailto:owen@emmausokc.org) or call/text me at 580-658-0652.

The next few weeks will lead to a church vote on January 10th.<sup>4</sup> Because Jeron would be transitioning within the staff from a student ministry role to the worship role, the move technically doesn't require a church vote. However, involving the congregation through discussion and a vote seems best, both for our church and for Jeron. We know music and staffing decisions are difficult and emotional, and I make this proposal (and Jeron acknowledges it) with open hands to God's will and direction for our church family.

## **5. Moving Ahead with Faith, Wisdom, and Humility**

When I served as Financial Aid Director at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary while working on PhD studies, I would often talk with students about faith and wisdom not being enemies in Scripture. As we move ahead with open hands, this combination of faith and wisdom will be important. It's always been the case, but this past year has demonstrated clearly that none of us has as much control or power as we think. Instead of leading to despair, this reality leads the people of God to greater courage and hope than ever before, and leads us to serve and love one another with greater patience and joy than ever before.

I use the following verses often in emails and notes to the church, and these words from Paul to the church at Philippi capture what I want to say in closing tonight:

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in us will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."  
(Philippians 1:3-6)

Sincerely,



Dr. Owen Nease

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<sup>4</sup> We are still working on the details of this vote to allow people to participate amid COVID. We will provide information about when and how to vote as we get closer to the New Year.

## Addendum

*Below is the Personnel Section from the Dec. 4, 2019, State of the Church Address.*

Our primary goal in 2020 for personnel is to solidify the music leadership position so we no longer need to operate in limbo. (Solidify might not even be the right word, because it makes it sound like we're trying to set something in stone and never change it. We know church and life don't work that way.)

We sometimes joke that David must be close to setting a record for longest Music Director interim at a church. If you don't know, David Hillis has served as the interim music leader for 8 years, plus 2 years before that as the Music Associate at Emmaus. There are numerous reasons why this period has lasted so long, but suffice it to say, David has ministered consistently and excellently. We owe it to him and his family — and to Emmaus as a whole — to seek God's direction and make decisions about the future. And, as we've talked with David about this plan, his response was exactly what you'd expect — supportive, wise, and kind.

To be clear, the discussion over the next few months will not be, "Should we keep David or not?" No one benefits from that conversation; and it misses the point of what we're seeking to do. Our prayers and conversations will focus on developing a plan for musical worship in our church and identifying who (maybe 1 person; maybe multiple) should lead this plan. For now, we've put together a basic profile for music leadership, but the details remain undetermined. Because of this, I'd ask for your trust when I say there are no hidden agendas related to what I've presented. We don't know where God will lead us, but we believe now is the time to take the next step and move out of this long-term interim season.

Frankly, making decisions about musical leadership, programming, and style are scary. Emotions run deep when we talk about music, and we know these discussions can be difficult for a church and impact both members and guests. However, as I said earlier, we don't feel it's fair for David or for our church if we further delay this process. So, the goal in 2020 is very simply that when 2021 rolls around, we're not having these same type of conversations (though, inevitably, other conversations will rise up to take their place!). As we go along, we'll keep you updated; for now, though, we just want to commit together to worship in spirit and truth each week as we sing, pray, fellowship, study Scripture, and respond to God's grace.