

Believe It!  
*God's Plan For The Church*

I know why people do this, it's an easy means of identification of Faith Community Church, but I always cringe when somebody says to me, "How is *your* church doing." What I don't say, because they weren't even thinking this way, but I want to say, "It's not my church, it's God's church and God is at work there."

Today is the 34<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the existence of this local fellowship. On January 10, 1978, 28 people (not families, but people) met together in tiny Saint John's chapel in Gambrills for our first worship service.

Those were unique days. There was no AC in the building, which was actually 2 rooms, the auditorium, which sat about 70 people, and a back room with an old kitchen.

It was directly across from what's now Sunrise Organic Farm that was then the US Naval Dairy Farm that supplied dairy products to the Naval Academy. A dairy farm means lots of cows and we knew those cows were there every time the wind blew our way.

One time in the summer a chaplain from Fort Mede visited. The pews were shellacked and when he got up to leave a large portion of that shellac stuck to his sport coat and pants.

Saint John's was a Episcopal church so the pulpit was raised up and over to the side. On the other side was a podium that held a large Bible and the podium was carved to represent a large wooden eagle. He was glaring down at everybody keeping watch. That's probably why the kids in the service didn't fool around much. He was intimidating.

There was an altar in the center where the Eucharist is celebrated because that's the focus of the Episcopalian service. The pulpit is to the side because preaching isn't the center of the service.

We needed Sunday school rooms for the children so we stretched two cables across the back room and used bed sheets to divide off the areas.

Two years into our existence we moved into Arundel Senior High School. At

first we used the 800 seat auditorium as a meeting area but we were just swallowed up so we eventually moved to the band room.

There were some advantages to the band room. For one thing I was down at floor level and the congregation was up on the risers. I liked that imagery. I didn't like the feel of Saint John's where I was way up above and looking way down on the congregation.

But there were some drawbacks to the band room. To get in and out you had to walk past me while I was preaching. At times the band came in to get their instruments during a service.

Back then there was no AC and no windows so in the summer it could get up to almost 95. I remember one July Sunday David Haag, one of our missionaries, was speaking. I was sitting in the congregation fading in and out because of the heat. I thought 2 things. Number 1, I thought, "I'm glad it's him up there and not me today," and number 2 I wondered how in the world our people sat through my preaching if this is what it was like!

Along with all that we had minimal heat in the winter, leaking skylights, and we never knew if we had a piano until we arrived on Sunday.

Actually that helped our building fund a lot. We found this property, committed ourselves to building with out borrowing, and built our original 5000 square foot building debt free. Several years later we built this current building debt free.

You know over the years people have told me what a great what a great job I did here. And each time I've tried to respond by pointing them to 2 other factors that far out weigh anything I could have done.

Number 1: This was God's doing. As you recount the history of Faith Community Church at every point it's obvious that God was building His church. I couldn't begin to recount all the instances of God's faithfulness to us over the years.

But there's a second factor in the existence of this church and it's faithful people who simply did what they believed God would have them do.

We've been in a series we're calling Believe It and we've been studying through this church fellowship's statement of faith. Today we've come to our statement on the church. Here's what we say...

The Universal Church, which is the body and bride of Christ, began with the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is made up of all true believers who have been placed into Christ's body by the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The Local Church should duplicate or manifest the pattern seen in "the Church which is His body". It is an assembly of believers called together by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of glorifying Christ through worship, prayer, fellowship, teaching, witnessing of Christ, and the observance of the ordinances of baptism by immersion and communion.

In looking at God's plan for the local body I want us to see three things...

*I. For A Church To Fulfill It's Purpose Takes Faithful People*

**Turn to Luke 16 page 1027**

When I was a brand new believer in Jesus Christ I heard someone make a statement that I never forgot. I even wrote it in the flyleaf of my Bible.

"Little things are little things, but faithfulness in little things is a big thing."

**Read verse 10**

That's a biblical principle that a lot of Christians overlook. You and I don't know what really goes on inside other people, even other believers. We hear their testimonies and see them at church. We get the impression that they're good, solid, dependable, trustworthy Christians.

Here's what God says. And this applies in church, in relationships, in business, watch how people handle the small things, it'll show you how they're going to deal with the bigger things.

I'd like you to think about something. What kind of people would be part of a church who met in a building with no AC in Maryland summers, had very little heat in the winter, had a nursery made out of a tiny foyer leading to the men's and ladies rooms, and had bed sheets for class room walls?

Who would worship and serve in a place you stuck to the pews and were overwhelmed by the fragrance of cow pies? Where the only instrument was an old organ, which had a mouse run out of it and down the aisle one Sunday?

Who only had two people to do special music so one week it was Barb Haines and the next week it was Sandy Regensburg.

I'll tell you who. People who believed that worshipping God and teaching His Word to others was more important than how comfortable they were.

The foundation of Faith Community Church was and still is, people who take God seriously and strive by His grace to do their best for Him. And that means that they're faithful in the little things, the inconvenient things.

When we met in the High School we had to set up everything each week. We carted hymn books, we moved chairs, we set up class rooms, a PA system, we rolled in a piano from across the building if need be.

That was a lot of work done by a lot of faithful people who were also generously and sacrificially giving to a building fund.

One week a couple visited and after the service they said to me, "We really enjoyed that. Do us a favor, when you get a real church give us a call." Obviously I never called them because I didn't have to get a "real church." The real church was all around them moving chairs and tearing down class rooms but they couldn't see it. They meant, when you build a building.

We had a guy that we hired to be on staff many years ago. It didn't work out well and here's one of the reasons. He said to me one day, "People like you. They respect you. You're the Pastor. I'm the assistant pastor so they should like and respect me."

What he was saying was I want some kind of honor from people because I have a title. I tried to explain that over the years I had visited them in the hospital, dedicated their babies, done funerals for their parents. I said give it some time. Serve people. Don't worry about a title. Just be faithful in little things.

For the local church to manifest the pattern of the universal Body of Christ it takes faithful believers. Are you being faithful with what you have? Maybe you only have an hour a week to help out in some way. Are you using that hour wisely or are you saying, “Hey, they built this for me. I’m going to sit back and enjoy the results of other people’s faithfulness.”

*I. For A Church To Fulfill It’s Purpose Takes Faithful People*

*II. Sometimes We Don’t Get To See The Fruit Of Our Faithfulness*

## **Turn to Hebrews 11 page 1181**

Hebrews is a book written to encourage Jewish background believers in the first century to keep on serving God in faithfulness.

They were being persecuted by their fellow Jews because they were following Jesus. The temptation was to go back to Judaism when Judaism was the foundation of Christianity.

It was like they wanted to reject the fullness and go back to what led up to the fullness. So God was using the author of this book to encourage them to keep on keeping on.

In chapter 11 he lists a whole catalog of faithful Old Testament believers who were delivered by God’s hand. But in verse 35 he begins another list.

### **Read verses 35b-38**

I have to believe that there’s a special place in eternity reserved for the “others.” It’s one thing to stay faithful when you can see an end. When you can see a result. It’s a totally different deal when you don’t see things work out but you stay faithful any way.

### **Read verses 39-40**

They didn’t obtain the promise. They didn’t see the fulfillment. They had to live totally by faith.

Sometimes we just stay faithful even though we don’t get to see the fruit.

When I was in Bible college in Florida a retired couple lived at the school and volunteered their time.

Ann ran the library and her husband Pat oversaw much of the building maintenance.

They were a quiet and unassuming couple that I barely knew. When I applied to Capital Seminary for grad school I had no idea how Sandy and I would cover our rent plus tuition and living expenses but we believed God was directing our lives.

Sandy was recovering from cancer and I hoped that she wouldn't have to work but we didn't know if that was possible.

Just before I enrolled in my first year of school the business office told me I had a full scholarship. As it turned out, Ann Patterson had once been librarian at Washington Bible College so she had a connection with both schools.

When she heard there were 2 students (Dean Cholar and I) going to Capital she and Pat set up a scholarship fund for FBC students. This was all supposed to be anonymous so I had to write a thank you notes without their names.

Pat and Ann Patterson lived a frugal life and invested what they had in the education of students headed for ministry because they believed in the priority of God's church.

They gave, never seeing the end result but I'm here today, Faith Community Church is here today, in great part because a Christian couple had the commitment to invest in the future.

Sometimes we don't get to see the result of our faithfulness to God but God multiplies every thing we offer to him.

Listen to how the Bible challenges the people of a local church in the first century...*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.* (I Corinthians 15:58)

The Bible says, *Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we*

*shall reap if we do not lose heart. (Galatians 6:9)*

The way to not grow weary is to keep focused on Jesus Christ. *For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. (Hebrews 12:3)*

A few years ago I had a chance to visit some friends who were part of this fellowship but had moved away years ago. They had a son who's a grown young man with kids of his own now. This guy was always one of the wild ones. He was one of those guys who would make Sunday School teachers shake their head and say he's hopeless.

You know what he said to me? He said, "Is Esther Ansel still teaching at Faith?" Esther Ansel was a dear saint of God that was up there in years and wasn't teaching any more. He said, "I know I gave her a hard time. I know she probably thought I wasn't listening to a thing she said. But I was.

I want her to know how much I now appreciate her faithfulness in my life."

I said you need to write her and tell her yourself.

Whose life are you impacting today? As you serve in the church you might not see instant results but you can be confident that God will use everything that's done in His name.

*I. For A Church To Fulfill It's Purpose Takes Faithful People*

*II. Sometimes We Don't Get To See The Fruit Of Our Faithfulness*

*III. We Are Faithful To Him Because He's Been Faithful To Us*

## **Turn to Matthew 16 page 963**

Jesus Christ actually only spent 3 years publicly teaching and preaching. Matthew 16 takes place in the second year of His ministry. Since Jesus exposed the religious establishment of His day as being corrupt and self-serving, hatred against Him was building.

Actually, there were a lot of debates going on as to who this outspoken rabbi really was, so Jesus asked his disciples, "What's the word on the street?"

### **Read verses 13-14**

Then He asks, “OK, what about you?”

### **Read verse 15**

Simon Peter was always quick to speak up. Sometimes he got things right. Sometimes he got things wrong. In this case he nailed it...

### **Read verse 16**

The word “Christ” isn’t Jesus last name. It’s a title. Peter says “You are *the* Christ...”

All down through history the Jews had been looking for the Messiah. There were hundreds of Old Testament prophecies about the deliverer/savior/Messiah.

“Messiah” comes from a Hebrew word that means “anointed one.” The disciples lived in a Greek speaking culture so they used the Greek equivalent, which was *christos*.

When Peter said you’re the Christ he was saying, “You are the anointed one. You’re the Savior.”

And look at how Jesus responds. Some people say that Jesus never claimed authority for Himself, that He was just a teacher and His followers made Him out to be larger than life.

### **Read verse 17**

“Jesus said I’m the Son of God and the Messiah. **Verse 18**

This is so important. Jesus said “I will build my church.” It’s His church and He’s the designer and builder.

The glory of the church isn’t in buildings or programs or membership. The glory of the church is Jesus Christ Himself.



And Jesus says to Peter, “You didn’t come up with this because somebody told you. You only know it because God revealed it to you.”

We could look at the church down through history and name all it’s mistakes. We could look at any local gathering of believers like Faith Community Church and point out the weaknesses.

But we’re not here because of us. The church exists because Jesus Christ is the builder and maker. He’s the ultimate foundation. The New Testament says He’s the chief cornerstone.

Jesus Christ is the one who has the answers to life. We wonder “Why am I here? What’s life all about? Is this all there is?”

The Bible says Jesus Christ is life.

Jesus said, *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.*(John 6:47) Because He died for our sins and rose again, all who trust in Him have eternal life.

The designer of the church is also the savior of the church. We have life in eternity because of Jesus.

He’s the foundation, he’s the reason, and really He’s the purpose of the church.

So He is the faithful one. And not only has Jesus Christ been faithful in establishing and building the Church, He ‘s been faithful for all 34 years of the life of this church.

Over the years we’ve experienced some amazing things from the hand of God.

Over 30 years ago I sat down with the tax maps of Anne Arundel County and gathered names of property owners of vacant pieces of ground. We prayerfully wrote to multiple property owners.

We were bold but we knew it had to be God who ultimately provided so we prayed over each letter. We wrote to individuals, home builders, we even wrote to the US Navy and asked them to sell us part of the Dairy Farm!

The owner of this property wrote us back. When we bought this land there was no traffic light at Route 3. The street off of Route 3 North came back 1 block and ended. A dirt road went back to a horse farm. We had no idea what the final layout of this area would be, but we knew that God had led us to an amazingly strategic piece of property. We were humbled by God's faithfulness.

The stories of God's provision and care could be multiplied a thousand times over. Today we have a building worth a couple of million dollars. We reach out here and around the world through an exciting missions program.

In partnership with KD Bhutt in India we've been able to buy property and build a school building that's reaching hundreds of families. Through a partnership with Dean Chollar we've built wells in Sudan that supply water to impoverished areas while local pastors share the message of Living Water.

Through our coworkers in Nicaragua we're been able to supply a Christian education to poor families and help a local association of churches.

We've been able to send thousands for relief efforts after the Indonesian Tsunami and hurricane Katrina

Because of the blessing of God we've been able to touch lives from Native Americans in our own country to people in Jordan, Brazil, Japan, and Papua New Guinea.

And here's the most amazing thing in the middle of all this. Except for the original purchase of the land here, we've never borrowed a penny and we've never been late on a bill.

That's why the theme song of Faith Community Church has been *Great is Thy Faithfulness*.

At the same time we've shed some heartfelt tears over people.

We've had people who we loved and considered the closest of brothers and sisters who've pulled away from God and wouldn't let anyone get into their life to help them and they've crashed and burned.

We've had people that we thought would be here serving till the rapture who got miffed about something and just took off. That's like having a brother or sister in our family who rejects the rest of the family. It hurts.

We've had people who were amazing servants of God who've gotten sick and passed away. We've got a plaque out in the foyer with way too many names on it of individuals that we had to do funerals for.

But you know what? Those things are hard but what keeps us focused is this. We're not here for ourselves. We're here to glorify our Head, Jesus Christ.

It's why we say in our statement of faith: It is an assembly of believers called together by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of glorifying Christ through worship, prayer, fellowship, teaching, witnessing of Christ, and the observance of the ordinances of baptism by immersion and communion.

We are faithful to Him because He has been and always will be, for now and eternity, faithful to us.