

Connecting All People To Jesus (Luke 14:16-24) [SLIDES 1-4]

Intro: The beginning of a new year. A need to remember who we are, where we came from, and where we are going.

I. The Rochester Church

A. Rochester used to be the wild frontier. [SLIDE 5] People from Detroit would load up the kids and take wagons or horses up here to vacation. It took Detroit becoming overcrowded before the population began moving this direction looking for places to live.

1. Churches followed the population.
2. [SLIDE 6] In the first half of the 20th century, churches were built along three blocks of Walnut Street, known locally as “church street.”
3. In the mid-point of that century, a Church of Christ was established on that street.

B. Three different dates are given for the start of that congregation. Some say 1952 while others say 1953, but the oldest known history of our congregation – written by pioneer member and former elder, Earl Crosslin – says [SLIDE 7] “On August 23, 1951, seven people attended the first worship assembly of the church of Christ at 340 Walnut Boulevard in Rochester, Michigan.”

1. But why start another church? There were already so many churches on Walnut Street that surely they could serve everyone... right?
2. Those seven people had no intention of starting just another church. They had a mission to do something different, something world changing – they wanted to be the church of God’s intent.

II. So Many Churches

A. Take an hour or so to pour through the yellow pages and look at the selection of churches available. Without wanting to insult or offend any who go to any of those churches, it can be safely said that the vast majority of them exist for one of these reasons:

1. [SLIDE 8] To maintain the traditions. People arrived here with religious traditions, often linked

to national or ethnic background. These churches exist to be that traditional, cultural center.

2. [SLIDE 9] Other churches have no national or cultural identity, but exist for a social purpose. They attract people who look like them and act like them and who want what they want.
 - i. every congregation has an identity.
 - ii. To belong to their congregation requires that you don that same identity.
 - iii. Or, more likely, it attracts people who are already possessed of that identity.
 3. [SLIDE 10] Other churches exist to serve their members. Look at their bulletins, listen to their announcements, and go over the bulletin boards and you will see program after program and all the energy focused on meeting the needs of the members already attending that church.
- B.** The Rochester Church, [SLIDE 11] from its beginnings, took a different path (we do not claim that we are the only ones, but we acknowledge that this is certainly the road less traveled).
- C.** All of us present today are standing on the shoulders of those who saw a lot of churches on Walnut Street and thought “there is something missing; something very important is missing here.”
- D.** They took seriously the Great Commission and Jesus’ command to “love one another.” They went into the highways and byways to find those left behind by other churches.
1. They built on Avon Road, remodeled, expanded, moved, and built again. And here we are in the building that was built in 1990 after hundreds of members sacrificed, prayed, sweated, and worked.
 2. We rest on the foundation of that work. We should acknowledge that and keep those pioneers of faith in our prayers, some of whom are now with the Lord, others who have retired and moved out of State, and some who are still with us today.

III. Our Mission

- A.** How seriously has Rochester taken its mission? When I arrived here in 2001, one of the first things I noticed was that this building wasn't like most church buildings. This one was used – a lot.
1. [SLIDE 12] About a dozen community groups use our building on a regular basis; some of them, several times a week.
 2. [SLIDE 13] NA, AA, mothers' support groups, grief recovery groups, divorce recovery groups, Home School support groups...
 3. When the one year anniversary of 9/11 was held, the community came here to do so, knowing that they were welcome regardless of their faith, their denominational background, or their lifestyle.
 4. We are the rally point for children in this area should a gunman or terrorist strike any of our schools.
 5. [SLIDE 14] We have had a counselor or two or three working from this building for years as a sign of our commitment to individuals and families.
 6. [SLIDE 15] When Rochester Symphony needed a place to practice and play, we opened our doors to them.
 7. We have opened our doors to those who needed to hold a funeral, special community events, musical productions, weddings.
- B.** [SLIDE 16] Our benevolence team works incredibly hard (and in the background) to help those who have stumbled financially.
- C.** [SLIDE 17] God's Helping Hands, started by two members here after they suffered the horrifying loss of a child, has now blossomed into the largest supplier of food and clothing in Oakland County.
- D.** [SLIDE 18] Teams from here brave the cold, wind, or heat to go feed the homeless. Countless people here have spent their precious dollars to cook or supply clothing or barbecue grills and trailers to get the supplies to the poor.
- E.** When a skateboarder overdosed, we threw open the doors of our building and the doors of our hearts and

welcomed in hundreds – many of whom had never been in a church building before.

F. Why? Matthew 25:31-40. [SLIDES 19-25]

IV. Our Continuing Call

A. What do we have to offer the religious and the irreligious world?

1. [SLIDE 26] A place where they will be loved.
2. A place that honors the scripture and is tireless in reading it, praying about it, and discovering what God has to say to us. (discerning the times)
3. A place where baptism has been restored to its rightful place.
4. A place where the Lords Supper is returned to the people.
5. A place of freedom where each individual is free to work out their own salvation while maintaining unity with all others here.

B. We moved to small groups to allow a greater sense of accountability and community and to encourage spiritual growth and scriptural knowledge.

C. We have begun a great work in Christ Church Macomb – the first of many multi-sites, for we take seriously the command to “Go” and do not replace it with an invitation to “come to us.”

D. We are looking at better ways to reach the lost here and in every corner of the world. Our own children, raised here and dearly loved, have gone on to be missionaries in Africa, Honduras, Brazil, and on the streets of New York City.

E. Why? So that we can stand before Jesus on that final day and hear, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter now into the joys of the Lord.”

F. We call you to join us in this vision, on this quest, on this sacred journey home.