



Transition to 3 Services

Details, History, FAQs and thoughts on a Welcoming Community

Quick Details:

- Transition Date: Sunday, February 21st, 2010 (1st Sunday of Lent)
- Service Times: 8:30AM, 10AM, and 11:30AM
- Children's Ministry: Nursery (0-3) at 8:30, All Ages at 10:00, Nursery (0-3) at 11:30

History:

- Approximately 5 years ago we transitioned from 1 to 2 services.
- The transition felt awkward at times, but over the next number of months we "got used" to two services and attendance at both services began to fill out, to the point of being regularly "full" (i.e. 75% plus of all chairs used/taken). This made it hard to continue being a "welcoming" church; one that consistently communicated to those who were new or visiting that there was in fact room for them here among us.
- To help resolve this tension, we assembled a space committee to explore what it might look like (what places would be an option) and what resources (fiscal, staff, etc.) might be required in order to get more space so we could again be welcoming.
- 7 months ago, we launched a new fiscal budget ('09-'10) that included new staff and a significantly larger line-item for facilities and rent. For the first time in 4 years, we actually had the resources to go after more space and be welcoming.
- 4 months ago (September 2009) all possibilities for a larger space in the Pearl District failed to pan-out and opportunities came together to make EcoTrust a more desirable space at least in the near future. Our space committee and pastoral staff decided to invest our resources here, in making the very best use of the space we do have at EcoTrust. This explicitly meant preparing to go to 3 services.

FAQ:

Q. Why 3 Services?

A. To create more space in each service so visitors and newcomers can experience Pearl Church as a place where there is room for them.

Q. Don't we have enough space already? Do we really need a 3rd service?

A. No, we do not currently have enough space. Researchers agree that once a certain percentage of seats are taken (75 to 80%), a room *appears full* to newcomers/visitors and/or those arriving late. Generally speaking, unless there are plenty of seats available, the message being sent is, "there is not room for you here."

Q. What about services I've attended where there really is plenty of room?

A. It's true, Pearl has hosted many services over the past number of years where there have been as few as 50-60 people attending. This means at those services there have been 70+ available chairs and we have not risked sending the message that there is no room here for newcomers. However, much more often there have been more than 120 people attending a single service, leaving fewer than 10 available chairs, or in some cases no chairs at all. At these services, we have sent a clear message to newcomers: "there is not room for you here."

Q. So what's the purpose of all this? Is it just about "church growth?"

A. No, our desire not necessarily to grow large. Instead, the heart behind adding a 3rd service is to be a more welcoming community by decreasing the number of people who currently attend each service (hopefully by spreading those who currently attend as evenly as possible among the 3 services) so that visitors and newcomers can experience the fact that there is *room for them here among us*.

Q. What if one or more of the services are small? Won't that feel awkward?

A. We absolutely anticipate both the 8:30AM and the 11:30AM services being lightly attended at times. This will likely feel awkward for a bit. We felt this same feeling when we made the transition from 1 service to 2 services approximately 5 years ago. The first month or so, it felt funny and empty. But relatively quickly, those who visited began to realize there was room for them here among us and with time both services filled out, to the point that we are now making the transition to adding a 3rd.

Q. What's Next? 4 or 5 services?

A. To be clear, we believe the resources currently available (fiscal, pastoral, facility, infrastructure, etc.) are enough to support a congregation with 3 full services at EcoTrust (120 people at 3 services = approx 360 weekly attendees) but no more.

Q. Won't this be hard on many of ministries?

A. In some cases, yes. Our church staff is deeply committed to caring for, preparing, helping, and protecting those who volunteer in the ministries most affected by this change. We've also identified the ministry at highest risk for burn out (Sound Ministry) and have re-allocated money from our budget to create a new staff position titled "Sound Technician" who will then care for all the responsibilities of the Sound Ministry moving forward.

Q. Won't 3 services leave us feeling even disconnected and fragmented?

A. Yes. This is a real issue for us. To address this reality, we plan to host a number of services each year (perhaps New Season Sundays) at a larger venue that would enable us to worship together as a church at just one service, which we hope will help this community feel connected and whole.

A Welcoming Community

- The last four years (being full without resources to make more space) has undoubtedly allowed us to get used to being this size and has not caused or required us to be or to grow in our ability to be a welcoming community.
- If we are to exhibit this reality at Pearl; if we are to again be experienced as a welcoming community, we must take practical and intentional steps.
- Ideas that could help:
 - We could remember that every single one of us had a 1st Sunday at Pearl.
 - We could call this memory to mind, and imagine why we came back, stayed, explored, and eventually committed to this community: because there was space for us here and because someone welcomed us. We then seek to extend that same experience to others.
 - We could embrace a theology of a welcoming people.
 - Those of us who are able could attend the 8:30 or the 11:30 service.