

A black and white photograph of a city square. In the foreground, there is a wide, paved sidewalk with several benches and a trash can. In the background, there are large, leafless trees and a multi-story brick building. The building has a sign that says "WEBSTER'S" above its entrance. A traffic light is visible on the right side of the square. The sky is overcast.

2023 YEAR-END REPORT



CHURCH IN THE SQUARE

The Apostle Paul brought his letter to the Romans to a conclusion by celebrating his community. (And we certainly celebrated as a community having spent nearly four years in the book!) Scores of men and women were “fellow workers” in the gospel and instrumental in establishing the new church family in Rome. Specifically, he commended his readers to welcome Phoebe “in a way worthy of the saints ... for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well” (Romans 16:2). She hand delivered Paul’s letter to Rome as he went east to minister to the poor in Jerusalem.

Much of Romans is focused on articulating gospel truth. But the conclusion is dedicated to naming people who embody the good news in their city. Suffice it to say, Paul’s salutation has inspired us to reflect on the fellow workers God has brought together at Church in the Square. While it would be impossible to collect all the names and stories that Jesus used to build his church in 2023, we want to highlight a few in hopes that your soul will sing “to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen” (Romans 16:16).

TWO TEAMS

At the start of the new year, two teams were formed. The elders and deacons confirmed two key matters of the church and saw fit to take time to seek the Lord's will about a potential new church home and how to steward the gift of teaching at Church in the Square.

Our location team met for many months. They visited properties and surveyed the needs of our various ministries. In God's kindness, he made it abundantly clear that in order to care for the needs of our growing church family as well as to make space for more of our neighbors, a new home was necessary. However, our financial ability needed to mature in order for us to seriously consider a long-term lease or a mortgage. This led us to conduct a feasibility survey.

We asked our members to meditate on Jesus' teaching about Mammon in places like Matthew 6:24 and think about God's heart for our resources in passages like 2 Corinthians 8:1-9. Through this discipleship process we invited our members to consider one-time gifts and increasing monthly giving in order to close a deficit, build up our savings for a potential down payment, and grow in our trust in the Lord. By

God's grace, this led to reducing the projected deficit for 2023 by \$15,000 and helping us strive for a budget surplus in 2024. To be sure, there's more to think about, but we're humbled to see the Lord's direction and provision.

Our Ephesians 4 team met for many months too. The elder team gave them this question:

Does Paul have women in mind when he writes Ephesians 4:11? If so, should women who are gifted in these ways use those gifts to preach and teach in all ministries of the local church, including but not limited to the Sunday morning sermon? If not, what limits and/or liberties should there be for women and non-elders who teach and preach, especially in the Sunday gathering?

This investigation led them through many passages of Scripture, podcasts, and books—especially Two Views of Women in Ministry. They shared thoughts and updates at multiple members' gatherings and submitted their initial findings to the elder team in September. In November they shared their report with the members alongside the elders response. Here's their answer:

Yes. When writing “teachers” (Gr: didaskalos) in Ephesians 4:11, Paul has women and non-elders who are gifted to teach in mind. Therefore, these gifted-individuals in the local church should teach, including, but not limited to, the Sunday morning sermon. The church should equip them to use this gift.

The implications of these findings will roll out next year. While this investigation does not change our church’s complementarian disposition—that eldership is reserved for qualified men—it does change who can and should teach on Sunday mornings. And so in 2024 we’ll start a teaching cohort to develop the teaching gifts of our church as well as update our position papers to reflect this change.

COMMUNITY

Through our Good Neighbors and deacon teams many of our partnerships continued this year. We celebrated another Harambee event with our friends at The Humanity share, helping to meet the needs of water scarcity in Kajiado County, Kenya. Additionally, we continued to support the Herculean efforts of the GAP ministry in Hermosa. Over the year, GAP has helped to resettle thousands of refugees, mainly from

Venezuela. It's been our joy to come alongside them and our new neighbors as they find housing, work, and community. In total, we were able to share \$30,000 to help continue the work God is doing in Kajiado County, Hermosa, and beyond.

As God did work around us, he was also working within our community. The numbers of our membership tell an important story to keep in context. In 2020 there were 134 members at our church. Through the pandemic that dropped to 70 and then 50. Through 2022 we climbed back to 60 and today there are 74 members at Church in the Square. We've said a lot of goodbyes in our five years together, but in his kindness we're saying hello too.

In fact, this year we experienced another challenging departure. Christina Wolken, our former Ministry for Operation and Connection, served our church family with love and skill from before we started. We're really thankful for the ways we look more like Jesus at Church in the Square because of Christina and her family. They remind us of Paul's good friends Prisca and Aquilla "who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well" (Romans 16:4).

The Lord has certainly grown us this year. As Paul concluded, he “is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages” (Romans 16:25). In particular the Lord has made us strong through his people—our brothers and sisters in Christ. Seeing you each embrace serving, giving, thinking and rethinking, worship, and small grouping together has further revealed to all of us the secret of Jesus’ truth and beauty.

With love and joy,

The Elders of Church in the Square



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