CROSS-SHAPED

A Church for the City

The Vision: Where is God leading us?

Ask anyone in Muskegon what our city needs and you might hear answers like, “better jobs,” “quality schools,” or “peace in the streets.” These are all, of course, important (and it’s our intent to address them), but we believe that what Muskegon needs, above all else, is Jesus. Not a bunch of people preaching about Jesus. Muskegon needs a bunch of people acting like Jesus.

Jesus lived what we call the cross-shaped life. Even though He was God, He humbled himself to become a human being, a servant, and even went so low as to die on a cross to forgive sinners. And as a result, God brought him back to life and made Him the King of kings. That’s the cross-shaped life. Emptying yourself of privilege and resources to help someone else.

When we follow in Jesus' footsteps, leveraging all of our privileges and resources for others, we live the cross-shaped life. This is the kind of life that God loves and uses to bring resurrection to His world. And this is what Muskegon needs. Muskegon needs a community of cross-shaped servants. Muskegon needs cross-shaped neighbors and coworkers, cross-shaped husbands and wives, cross-shaped moms and dads, cross-shaped children and teens.

This fall, at Calvary, we invite you to live the cross-shaped life in a cross-shaped church. We are praying that, over the next 5-10 years, the Calvary Church family becomes an indispensable asset in the spiritual and cultural renewal of the Muskegon area by learning from Jesus, acting like family, and serving our city. We want to be a cross-shaped community full of cross-shaped servants to the people of Muskegon. Simply put, we want to be **“a church for the city.”**

What do we mean by "spiritual and cultural renewal"?

There is growing optimism about Muskegon's future. The WATCH MUSKEGON campaign is stirring hearts. The rebirth of the downtown area has people talking. But all of this development, if not built solidly on Jesus and his concern for all people, will crumble.

Spiritually, the people of Muskegon have been drifting from God. 70% of Muskegon County's 170,000 people are not connected to Jesus' church, and that number is growing. "Nones" (people who identify with no church or religion) have increased by 25% over the past 25 years. Admittedly, some "nones" still follow Jesus but have become disillusioned with church as we know it. Even though there are more evangelical churches in Muskegon than in 2000, there are fewer evangelicals! The church in Muskegon doesn't seem to be helping and might actually be hurting the cause of Christ in some ways. We need renewal!

This drift from loving God has hurt our ability to love our neighbors too. Broken relationships exist between those who bear the image of God: men and women, blacks and whites, and the old and young. The "traditional" family is shrinking, forcing so many single moms to do life alone and creating unhealthy generational cycles for kids without fathers. Muskegon is ranked among the most racially segregated cities in the country, leading further to isolation and fear between groups of people who could otherwise learn from and serve one another. Hard hit by the recession, jobs have only just started to rebound, many of which do not provide a livable wage. Struggling schools, like Muskegon Heights, have suffered the loss of resources and momentum, only hurting kids more. The people of Muskegon need renewal!

Alongside other local churches and community development organizations, we want to serve our community in such a way so as to show Jesus' love and speak His truth so that people's relationships with God and others are made right. Vertical (love God) and horizontal (love your neighbor) reconciliation is our heartbeat. This is what we envision as "renewal." (2 Corinthians 5:14-21)

What do we mean by an "indispensable asset"?

Jesus envisions that His churches would make a meaningful difference wherever they live so that people in the community learn about God and thank Him as they watch His people do good. (Mat 5:13-17; John 13:34-35; 1 Pet 2:11-12) We want Calvary to make substantive contributions to the work God has already begun in Muskegon to the degree that Jesus' work through us would be missed should we disappear. We want the people of Muskegon to think of Calvary as a safe and servant-hearted family where Jesus' love is made tangible. We will strive to be humbly yet unapologetically…Christ-centered, truth-oriented, relationally-driven, grace-filled, externally-focused, and life-changing in all that we do.

The Plan: What steps help us get there?

Learn from Jesus

Commitment to historic orthodox Christianity. We are continually seeking to know and follow the biblical Jesus as our Savior and King. We do not want to assume that we have Him figured out but always go back to the Scriptures to learn about who He is, what He is up to in our world, and what He has called us to--namely, the cross-shaped life. All of our teaching and preaching centers on God's Word and focus on Christ-likeness in everyday life. We want to "have the mind of Christ" (Philippians 2:5)--think and live like Jesus.

Submitted in prayer. The work described throughout this vision depends on the work of God through His Holy Spirit in our church and city. Because we are praying "Your kingdom come," (Matthew 6:9-10) we must submit ourselves to Him, seeking to align ourselves with His will and asking Him to root out our personal agendas. A newly formed Prayer Team and the monthly PrayMuskegon effort (the 6th of every month) will help Calvary to this place of dependence and submission so His Spirit can do more through us than we can do on our own.

Sacred space to make Jesus known. Buildings and facilities are not the point of Jesus' church, but there is no question that one's environment either helps or hurts learning, relating, and serving. We want to do our best to utilize the resources and facilities God has given us. Currently, the elder and ministry teams are working to cultivate a vital partnership with First Baptist Church to establish a "home base" for making Jesus known. One such possibility is to move "out of the gym and into the sanctuary." This idea has obstacles to overcome, but the advantages are obvious: the space would minimize distractions and enable greater focus in learning about Jesus while freeing up the whole gym for kids, teens, and sports ministry.

Act Like Family

Renewed commitments to one another. For Calvary to become a place where Jesus' cross-shaped love shines, we must practice it with one another (John 13:34-35). LIFEgroups are mainly where this happens. Ideally, LIFEgroup members spend YEARS together, studying the Bible, praying, and serving. Over time, you learn one another's stories, dreams, passions, gifts, sins, struggles, fears, etc. We want to see everyone at Calvary joining a LIFEgroup when they are ready. New groups are starting all the time and longtime groups often welcome new members into their "family." Our commitment to one another also includes investing our time and, when possible, our talents in serving through our ministries. For example, we take very seriously the call to care for gift of kids and teens in our church family and city. It takes a village to raise a child, and we are eager to partner with parents who are discipling their children. Our children's and student ministries, led by servant leaders and caring volunteers, create environments for age-appropriate fun, learning, and serving. The ministry team would be delighted to help you make a difference in and through Calvary's ministries.

A unified strategy for member care. As we humbly serve one another, we want to care for each other spiritually and "bear one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:1-5). Calvary Cares is our new initiative to make sure ever Calvary family member experiences firsthand the love of Christ, especially when going through hard times. CARE groups will connect leaders with Calvary members to make sure that no one falls through the cracks. Redemption group will provide counsel and support for people going through various crises. This effort includes our food pantry and the "Calvary Cares" fund (formerly benevolent fund).

Servant leadership. Four years into our transition from being a senior pastor-led church to an elder-led church, God has taught us so much. We continue to refine and define the roles of our elder team, deacon team, and ministry team and hope to leverage everyone's God-given gifts to bless our church and city. We have even been exploring, for example, God's vision in the Bible to make sure the female voice is heard in what has been a traditionally all-male leadership environment.

Serve the City

Scattered for Jesus. We aren't really Jesus' church until we scatter to represent Him throughout the week. In the spring of 2016, we practiced the Art of Neighboring and want to develop our vision for being good neighbors, both around our building and in each of our own neighborhoods. Our jobs--whether at the factory, office, or home--is also a place where our hard work and humble witness points people to Jesus. We want to encourage and equip one another to be the ambassadors of the cross-shaped King throughout Muskegon.

Revitalized Muskegon partnerships. Serving Muskegon is a team effort. It's bigger than Calvary! There are many local churches and community organizations trying to live out Jesus' call to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:25-37). We want to refresh our commitment to local churches and agencies through involvement with PrayMuskegon (local churches praying 24/7) and Muskegon's new CCDA (Christian Community Development Association) network. We're also focusing in on some key partnerships like our on-campus outreach to students at Baker College, support and care for new moms (and dads) at Muskegon Pregnancy Services, Supper House (free dinner for Muskegon Heights), Adopt-a-Lot (lawn care for a vacant lot in the Nelson Neighborhood), and Love INC (resources and supports for people in crisis). We don't just donate to support these efforts! We get a our hands dirty in serving our fellow human beings.

Revitalized global partnerships. It's a strange thing that little Muskegon can bless the world, but we believe that, by God's grace, it certainly can! Through strategic ministry partners, the people of Muskegon have opportunities to meet very real needs around the world. 10% of all giving to Calvary gets sent beyond Muskegon to over 20 different partners, including, to name a few, a home for AIDS orphans in South Africa, a youth hostel for at-risk children in Thailand, and a Bible translation project for the Daagare people in West Africa! We are looking to support these projects by sending teams to serve and learn these cross-shaped partners.