

Love Aggressively; Never Compromise on Mission

An Interview With Pastor Travis Johnson

by John UpChurch

When you became the pastor of Homestead Church of God (now Life Pointe), what vision did God give you for the future of the church?

I wanted us to be a gospel-obsessed community that “loves God and man with reckless abandon.” Simple. No spiritual trinkets/gimmicks—just straightforward gospel. No holds barred. Radical service. Low barriers for entry where people could belong before they believed. Not seeker-sensitive, but seeker-comprehensible. I wanted us to be loud, rather than quiet. Permissive and daring. Full of sinners. Full of faith.

What were your first steps toward reaching that vision? Were they successful?

We considered ourselves a church replant. We rebranded, sold property, reopened, restructured, and relocated. In order to do all that, we had to have the buy-in from our church body and from the Church of God State Office. The process took several years. Our first steps were to create new power centers, new influencers within the church. We focused on bringing people from the fringes into the center while not increasing the influence of long-term influencers. Some of the long-term people bought into what we were doing. Some resisted.

The physical changes lent credence to and reinforced the vision. As small wins built up, we were able to tackle the greater pursuit of relaunching. Where there wasn't enough buy-in, we were able

to move forward anyway because I was working outside of the church, insulating me from financial protest. In the end, we accomplished what we were wanting to accomplish.

What were some of the biggest obstacles you faced in reaching the Homestead and Plantation Key communities? How did God help you overcome these challenges?

Our biggest challenge in Plantation Key was the perpetual turnover of pastors in the Plantation Key Church of God. For two years, we've heard about how

we won't stick around and how the “new church” will eventually close and leave. We respond by creating. We continue to launch home groups, serve the public high school football team, baptize, and serve the community. Our persistence, stories of personal transformation, and repositioning have slowly quieted those stigmas that even a name change, relaunching, and growth haven't been able to address.

In Homestead, some of the greatest challenges were subverted. My parents were a part of everything we were doing. While we haven't seen eye-to-eye on everything, I've always had their support.



Not a lot of people can say that. The other great challenge in Homestead was purely financial. Change can be violent. In the context of church change, the most resistant people have the money. As the saying goes, “He who pays, says.” Money has diffused vision many times. Newcomers generally don’t have money. So, transitioning is dangerous. For us, we found funding sources like renting out the church building to other churches/schools to fill the gap, which enabled us to relaunch more aggressively instead of transitioning slowly.

Was there a cathartic “transformational” moment for Life Pointe?

Yes. We had a family early on visit the church. He ran the Miami Beach Convention Center. I happened to have a trade show with my company in the Convention Center the day after their first visit. I rode to work with him every day and we shared. In the process, he bought into what we were doing and brought in crews to help make the vision happen. She volunteered full-time, working as my administrator for two years. At about the same time, Hurricane Charley hit Punta Gorda. We mobilized in less than 24 hours to help the Souls Harbor Church of God, which lost its roof. Out of a group of 75 people, we sent over 42 people with supplies in hand and completely reroofed the 10,000 square feet of church.

From that moment on, resistance to forward progress was heavily diminished by the louder, more powerful push toward gospel momentum.

What challenges have you faced with being a two-campus church? Has this approach helped the church grow?

The single greatest challenge of being

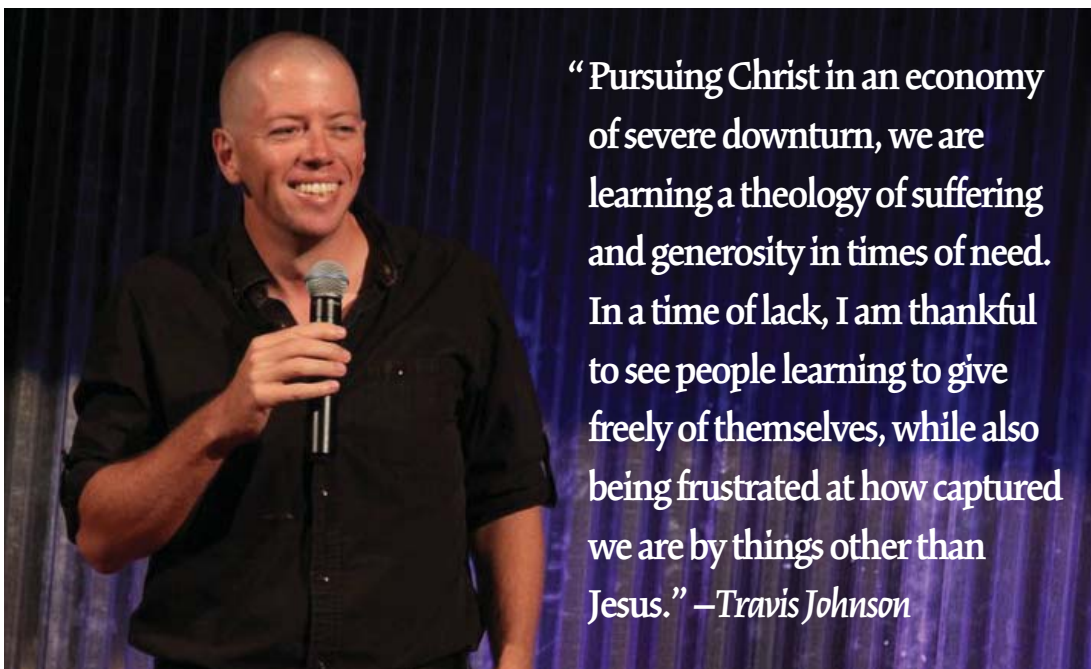
a multicampus church is developing a system of leadership multiplication. If a church is dysfunctional in leadership structure, it will multiply its dysfunction into multiple campuses. Leadership and structural health is critical multisite function.

Has it helped the church grow overall? I guess it depends on what lens one is looking through. We’ve certainly seen people come into a transforming relationship with Jesus who otherwise would not have through the ministry of Life Pointe Church. Has it helped us grow numerically? Yes and no. If we hadn’t launched

need. In a time of lack, I am thankful to see people learning to give freely of themselves, while also being frustrated at how captured we are by things other than Jesus. So, we strive to be missional. We certainly haven’t arrived—far from it.

What advice would you provide pastors and church leaders who want to see lives changed in their communities?

Love aggressively. Welcome everyone. Lift Jesus to the most prominent place. Do not allow success to move you into a defensive/protectionist posture.



“Pursuing Christ in an economy of severe downturn, we are learning a theology of suffering and generosity in times of need. In a time of lack, I am thankful to see people learning to give freely of themselves, while also being frustrated at how captured we are by things other than Jesus.” —Travis Johnson

a second campus, we would have more resources being brought to bear in Homestead. However, in the long term, I believe Life Pointe will be bigger as both campuses and additional campuses come on line and grow in maturity as the flywheel effect kicks in over time and leaders continue to be developed.

Would you describe Life Pointe as “missional” or “on mission”?

Life Pointe is on mission . . . sometimes. Like any church, we get distracted. Pursuing Christ in an economy of severe downturn, we are learning a theology of suffering and generosity in times of

Embrace your inner old-school-gospel-pioneering DNA. Don’t play it safe. Be dependent on the Holy Spirit. Err on the side of loving the unlovable. Focus on the man in the ditch. Touch the untouchable. Preach the gospel with boldness.

Love people who hurt you. Love people you hurt, and apologize as quickly and honestly as possible. Don’t burn bridges. Feed sheep. Fight for the marginalized. Never, ever compromise on mission. Be unyielding when it comes to mission, even if it means you lose friends. Don’t die for or part fellowship over the negotiables. Call people to Jesus instead of your own personality. ☪