

2024 Discipleship Report Submitted by Pastor Helen

I. A brief personal reflection on ministry from the past year.

God continues to exceed any expectations or hopes I may have! Although we started with about 108 people in groups last Winter, when I made the God-sized goal of 120, we were well before that at the end of 2023. Yet, here we are, over 150 a year later! If I prayed for a group of a certain kind, God provided a leader for it! If I prayed for a certain leader to be raised up, they had their own group within months! If I prayed for a specific person to step out of their comfort zone and join a group or pray in group or have a new perspective...God delivered! Every God-sized prayer I can think of from this year, he has not only met but he has exceeded!

II. Celebrating Ministry Highlights

- Groups and leaders are paving the way for more ministries, such as our new Care and Missions Ministries. Many leaders also serve as a ministry lead and participate in evening prayer lounge, prayer challenges and additional enrichment opportunities offered throughout the year. Two leaders have planted churches.
- Our group for young moms produced many baptisms and child dedications. There were actually so many that we needed to schedule a special night just for them!
- Groups really started to embrace the service (outward) component of group life. Group initiated projects include, but are not limited to: filling and distributing bags to those experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia, painting the new office and hostessing a Baby Shower for Options Women's Center, adopting Angel Tree families, providing Thanksgiving meals to VIP families, babysitting for moms during our newly-formed PPD Support Group (done in partnership with NAMI), and blazing a prayer trail on the far end of our property.
- Our fundraiser for counseling sessions far exceeded any expectations. The original plan was to have the church match 40 donated sessions, for a total of 80 sessions (or about \$3k worth of counseling). By the time the 1-month fundraiser in May was over, we had \$10k to use to subsidize sessions!
- I worked with staff to identify our church's definition of disciple: a **disciple** is someone who is being **changed** by Christ & is **committed** to **following** HIM and His mission.
- Many new resources were added to the church website to assist with spiritual formation, understanding scripture and an enhanced prayer life.

III. Metrics and Growth

- In Semester 1 (Winter 2024) we had 12 groups and 19 leaders with an average size of 9 (roughly 108 people). We ended 2024 with 19 groups and almost 30 leaders.
- Evening Prayer lounge was established on a monthly basis.
- Over 30 women, in total, attended across three women's retreats or conferences throughout the year.
- About 20 individuals attended Mental Health First Aid and Youth Mental Health First Aid sessions.

- Four books were published and made available to the congregation: two Advent devotionals, one Easter devotional and one Baptism/Dedication workbook.
- Two prayer challenges were offered (January and July) as well as Enrich and Reset, a 6-week class offered in January that focused on spiritual disciplines, which was very well attended throughout the tenure of the course.
- This year's goals included having more than 120 people in groups, incorporating mental health components into the life of our church, enhancing baptism materials and support after, and growing 412 groups more. All have been accomplished except the last, although there is still one 412 group still meeting from when they were first introduced a year or two ago. Being only part-time made it challenging to meet all four goals in one year.

IV. Looking Forward: Vision for the Future

- We will explore expanding Grow Groups to include youth-led groups for youth.
- We will offer Youth Mental Health First Aid again Winter 2025 and encourage all youth-involved volunteers/leaders to attend.
- Leaders will be given the opportunity to study "Real-Life Discipleship" with other leaders at a casual pace not meant to add a burden to already packed schedules.
- 412 Groups will be promoted, especially between Grow Group Semesters (micro environments)
- Additional retreat opportunities for youth, men, women, and couples will be explored and encouraged (macro environments).
- Grow Groups will continue to expand and encourage leaders, as well as other forms of service, from within.
- A "discipleship pathway" is being discerned and I hope it will be finalized in 2025. Offering *Experiencing God* again in the spring through Grow Groups will be a part of implementing this.
- How much gets accomplished is really in God's perfect timing. I am committed to working here full-time should the opportunity present itself in 2025, which would greatly help accomplish more rather than less and I will trust in his provision for the discipleship ministry here.
- My prayer is that more people find their calling through groups and that their faith deepens to an unshakable depth. When we look at the model based on spiritual infants, children, young adults, etc., my prayer would be that all mature 1-2 stages, if not more, in this coming year.

V. Gratitude and Closing

- I am especially grateful for the four leaders who stepped up to act as a go-between for myself and all other leaders. Overseeing 25+ leaders well isn't possible but if we can build out this intermediary level as needed, we will be able to expand the group grow structure indefinitely.
- I am also grateful for the leaders who identified and raised up other leaders as well as those who responded to the invitation to lead. This ministry couldn't grow without this happening. To that end, I'm extremely grateful for all the leaders!
- I'm grateful to the board who agrees to provide enrichment funds to leaders and to cover the costs of their books/materials. It can take a lot to lead for a semester and these small tokens of appreciation allow us to love on our leaders.