

## Planning for Our Future: Aspen Strategy

Our mission at Southview is to lead as many as possible to passionately follow Christ. Clearly, that can only happen as a work of God accomplished through the power of his Holy Spirit. But God also gives *us* responsibilities in how we move out with that mission. So our church leadership has prayerfully weighed and discerned how we can best move forward strategically with that mission Scripture gives us.

There are several learnings and considerations that guide us as a community:

- *We believe that healthy organisms grow.* So we want to continue to grow – and not just numerically. We want to grow in maturity in Christ, in reflecting his image individually and as a body. But we also do want to grow numerically, because we want to lead as many as possible to passionately follow Christ.
- *Our desire is to join God in what He is doing in our midst.* We know that God is already at work in us and our community. We can best discern how we should move into the *future* by discerning how God is *currently* working among us and our community
- *We have been moving forward as a church with a regional vision.* We want to minister within our surrounding community and to the communities of our region in south Calgary. We believe (and have experienced) that there are many benefits to being a larger church body. A larger church has resources and ministry capabilities (e.g., missions efforts; specialized ministries; ministry opportunities for the church body) beyond what a small church can provide.
- *We know that studies have consistently shown, though, that healthy new church plants: grow more quickly; have a higher rate of involvement from those attending; and see a higher percentage of individuals come to faith in Christ.* Smaller church gatherings also provide an intimacy and sense of community for which our society seems to be longing. As has been seen in our own district over the past twenty years, though, getting a church plant to the point where it *is* healthy is a significant challenge. A large number of church plants never get to the point of health, strength or viability. This can be due to a number of factors: lack of leadership, lack of resources, lack of man-power in establishing support ministries.
- *Our current space restrictions at our Evergreen campus have prompted us to consider creative ways of providing room to continue to grow over the coming few years, prior to moving to Providence.*

All of these considerations raise obvious questions: What will *our* growth look like? How will we “manage” our growth so that those who are part of us and those who come to us are cared for and encouraged in their journey with Christ? How will our ministries in Bridlewood and Providence mesh?

As a means of answering those questions, we point to the Aspen Groves that flourish in the Rocky Mountains hovering along our horizon. To help in visualizing, we’ve attached an image of them below:



**God designed aspens with several distinctive attributes (these are the observations of scientists, not my own):**

- **Aspens are “communal” trees.** A grove or colony of aspen starts with a single tree, but off of this tree other trees grow. The colony spreads by means of a strong, expanding root system. Although these new trees appear to be independent, single-standing trees, they are connected to the parent tree and other trees of the colony through this expanding root system.
- **Aspens are inter-dependent.** Even once a new aspen tree grows into maturity, it stays connected to the parent tree and the rest of the colony. If one tree in the colony weakens, it gains strength, sustenance and resource from the other trees of the colony.
- **Aspens display similar behaviour.** Although each aspen tree is unique, all of the interconnected trees in a colony are a single organism. The trees of a colony

therefore exhibit synchronous behaviour - for example, all the component trees will come into leaf at the same time.

- **Aspens are expansive.** Aspen colonies can become very large with time, eventually covering many hectares. Although particularly prominent in the regions of the Rocky mountains, aspens are one of the most widely distributed trees in the world, covering virtually the entire boreal biome.
- **Aspens are extremely resilient.** They flourish best following a disturbance or storm. They are able to survive intense forest fires as the roots are below the heat of the fire, with new sprouts growing after the fire is out. Although a single tree in the colony may only live for 50-150 years above ground, the root system of the colony is long-lived, in some cases for many thousands of years, sending up new trunks as the older trunks die off above ground. One such colony in Utah, given the nickname of "Pando", is estimated by some scientists to be 80,000 years old, making it one of the oldest and largest known organisms on our planet.
- **Aspens are aggressive pioneers.** They readily colonize burns and can hold invaded land even though subjected to fires at intervals as short as three years.

With these attributes in mind, we believe the Aspen serves as a very fitting metaphor for our future growth strategy:

### *Aspen Strategy:*

*“Build a network of inter-connected worship services, gathering places and campuses, which share leadership, resources, and support ministries, while allowing each gathering/campus to minister in a unique way to its surrounding community.”*

Through this strategy we believe that we can thereby blend the strengths of new church plants with the strengths of having an inter-connected “colony” of church gatherings.

We will establish Providence as the parent campus off of which other branches of Southview will grow. These branches or gatherings will have three primary expressions:

- **On-Site:** Some of these gatherings could meet on-site at Providence, but in the chapel or multi-purpose area. While our main worship services would likely all be fairly similar in format, this would allow us to provide other services on-site that had different styles or formats.
- **Off-Site:** Other gatherings would be off-site in purchased or rented facilities in Calgary - similar to *imago dei* – meeting in schools, other church facilities or community centres.
- **“Atypical”:** Still other gatherings might be atypical in location or format, meeting in locations such as a restaurant or a home, or being connected to

Southview from a distance. We want to be open to a range of kingdom partnerships that allow us to join God in what he is doing.

As we move out in this direction, the natural question that arises is: “*If we have gatherings meeting in a range of places and areas, how do we build a united purpose among all gathering sites? How do we maintain a common voice and vision?*”

**All gatherings will be united by three critical elements:**

- **Vision:** Our vision, statement of faith and symbol will express how each one of our gatherings seeks to move forward. Within those parameters, there could be a range of expressions.
- **Leadership:** Each gathering will come under the leadership of the elders of Southview. Gatherings might have their own leadership team to work out specifics of service and ministry planning (just as we do at *imago dei*), but they will still come under the spiritual oversight of the elders.
- **Teaching:** Each gathering will share the same message and teacher each week by video-feed. Although the primary teaching voice would be the same at all campuses, each gathering or campus would be overseen by a campus pastor who has a voice in, is a member of, and is supported by Southview’s pastoral staff.

**We believe there are many benefits to this type of strategy:**

- We believe we will be able to maintain a smaller church feel and sense of community at our gatherings, while also providing the support ministries and resources of a larger church.
- We can accomplish more together than we can separately by not having to duplicate certain administrative and ministry provisions.
- It allows for the possibility of a campus moving out as a new independent church once it reaches a critical mass and displays identifiable health indicators.
- We will be able to offer a breadth of ministry expressions, styles in a range of neighborhood locations.
- Like the yeast of the kingdom, it is expansive in nature.
- It is the church *moving out* to the people in their communities, instead of us *waiting for* the people to come to us at a single location.
- We will be able to have greater flexibility and resilience in ministry in these changing times. (For example, we will be able to build a smaller, more flexible facility at Providence.)
- It enables us to join God in how he seems to be working among us at present (e.g., our Providence plans; our *imago* campus)

There certainly are many other questions and considerations involved in moving ahead with this type of strategy. We believe this Aspen strategy, though, is a strong expression of our heart, history, calling and leadings as a church body.