Saturdays in the Park

When I think of summer, I think of Chicago—the city and the band. One of my favorite bands is Chicago. They have stood the test of time in the music biz, writing some classic tunes, especially their older material from the 1970s. One of their most popular songs is “Saturday in the Park.” The song paints a wonderful picture of a summer Saturday in Chicago. When Laura and I lived in Chicago, we loved getting out into the city, down to lakeshore drive and the park and into the neighborhoods, celebrating a Saturday in the summer with lots of people and food and activity. It was a celebration of being alive.

Albert Lea has a number of wonderful parks. There is a nice lake nearby many of them. So I thought: we should celebrate “Saturday in the Park” in Albert Lea throughout this summer! shouldn’t we?

So what is Saturday in the Park? It is a time to get together with other people and celebrate life and family and fun at one of the parks in Albert Lea.

Who can come? This is the great part. Anyone can come. The idea is that Saturdays in the Park will give us an opportunity to get to know each other. If you have kids, it gives them a place to play together. It’s good for parents and adults to relax and enjoy life. It is a great opportunity to bring a friend or co-worker to something related to your faith community, but not in church. It’s free fun and food with great people. Does it get any better? Well, maybe.

When are these? On Saturdays, of course. They will be in the later afternoon into evening, from 3:00 until 6:00 pm or whenever people finally leave. No requirement. Just show up.

The schedule is as follows:

**June 14:** Special Father’s Day Time @ Lakeview Park
**June 28:** Morin Park just south of the church bldg.
**July 12:** Lakeview Park
**July 26:** Edgewater Park (South Pavilion)
**August 9:** Pioneer Park
**August 23:** Edgewater Park (South Pavilion)

“Live your life in a manner worthy of the good news of Christ…standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, working side by side in trust in the good news.”

~Philippians 1:27-28
What is “connections” all about?
The new guy in town finally is getting a grip on what the heck he’s doing.

Many of you know that I (Kyle) have experienced a significant career change. This happened basically when I started at FLC.

I had been in the academic world since 2001—researching, writing, giving presentations to groups of people where nearly 75% of them had pocket protectors to hold their pens. I loved the academic rigor, the atmosphere of debate and argument, the quest for new information, knowledge, and insight into the historical contexts of earliest Christianity. I was energized at the realization that the way the church does things today is quite removed from the way Jesus and the earliest Christians did things. (Unfortunately these realizations came frequently.)

I also felt quite out of place. I never had been an “academic” at heart. I just really thrived on learning about Jesus in his historical context, and about the earliest believers in Jesus and how they lived out their faith in their world.

While teaching in various institutions I often thought to myself: people in congregations need to be learning this stuff! This learning and this information is not just for the “academics” or the “professional” church leaders! (As a side note: “professional” church leaders as we have them today never existed for the early church.)

I was growing tired with the academic world. I still loved and thrived on the research, writing, and other stuff. I loved teaching. I loved having a classroom of college students, eager to learn. I was also quite discontent with the church in light of what I had learned about ancient Christianity. That’s when John Holt called me.

So now I am here at FLC, learning how to bring by passions and strengths into pastoral leadership. Learning, Struggling, Failing, Being energized. Getting back up. Sorting the wheat from the chaff. And on and on...

So what’s this have to do with “connections”?

As part of my job (a significant part of my job, as it turns out), I have the joy and honor of working with families and adults.

“Faith is not passive; it is active living to change the world.”

Sure, I am playing the role of leader in the church. But I hope to be a disposable one. Your faith does not depend on my leadership.

Through “connections” my goal is to gather people together to build relationships, for the purpose of deepening faith, so that you and we all can be effective disciples of Jesus in our families, our jobs, our world. Getting together without faith is just social gathering; faith without getting together is just doctrine. We need both for purposeful life and purposeful faith. My hope is to inspire leadership in faith and discipleship to Jesus relationally through connections. That’s what it’s all about. That’s what it’s ALWAYS been about. Pure and simple. Faith is not passive. It is not “religion.” It is being caught up into God’s mission in Jesus Christ to change the world.

Tuesday Morning Coffee
Are you a morning person? Are you interested in beginning your day, one day a week, with some fellowship with others, and with a Spiritual kick-start, encouragement, and some Bible study to fuel your day? You do not need to be a Bible person. You don’t even need to know the Bible well at all. Just have a desire to begin your day with others who want faith to be at the center.

Come to Tuesday Morning Coffee. We begin at 7:00 AM at Prairie Winds Coffee Shop. It’s 30-45 minutes to get together with others, read some Scripture, share prayer requests. You’ll be done in time to get back home if you need to help out in the mornings, or just head off to work for the day.

The lunch version is also on Tuesdays at 12:15 at Prairie Winds. (They have good sandwiches for lunch there. We may also meet at Jake’s Pizza on occasion.) Beginning Tuesday, June 17th.

A thought or two about church…In 1526 the Reformation theologian Martin Luther advocated for what he called “another kind” of worship gathering, which he considered “more significant” for people who “seriously want to be Christ-followers…with their actions, words, and lives.” This “(other) kind” of worship was in a home, where laypeople worshipped by sharing life, growing relationally as friends in Christ, praying together, and even performing communion and baptism in the home. They also functioned as small hubs for service to their neighborhood and community. He went on to say that he regretted that people in his time were reluctant to do this. Interesting, isn’t it?
Summer Progressive Dinner

Last December we had a progressive dinner party. It was a good time. We had around forty people show up. It was a great chance to gather in several different homes, get to know each other a bit, and have a nice evening as adults.

Then the momentum seems to have stopped. The demands of being a pastor hit, and unfortunately some of the fuel to keep that fire going had to be used elsewhere. A problem with the traditional model of church leadership rears its head.

Alas! Do not lose heart! A new path in the woods is being cut! It’s time to begin to carry out pastoral leadership in new ways, and not the old traditional ones. This means that the fuel for this crazy train can be more deliberately purposed. This means a return to Progressive Dinner! It’s a chance for a “take two”—to build more sustained momentum.

So, what is a progressive dinner? It is a multi-course meal where each course is at a different host home. It is a chance to really get to know people in their environment.

Who makes food? Anyone can make the food! Usually it is best for the host home and one or two other couples or individuals to provide the food for a course of the meal.

When is the Summer Edition? Friday, July 11th from 6:00 to 9:30 (or later).

What’s next? We need people to volunteer their homes, and to volunteer to cook! Please contact Kyle to volunteer to make this a fantastic evening! Email at kyle@flcal.org by June 20th.

Community Groups

We live in a world of decreasing closeness. We also live in a world where more and more people are crying out for closeness and more intimacy with others. Big box stores are being shunned in place of local merchants; mass-produced food is losing in favor of locally grown; large churches are losing to more intimate “house church” models. The most thriving communities of faith are turning out to be ones that are centered in small to medium groups who create family units that then gather as a larger group for corporate worship. Faith is returning to find its center in the home, rather than the “church” institution. “Returning” is a key word here. Small communities of friends centered in the home is where the life of faith in Jesus Christ began and where it has always thrived from the very start.

For those of you interested in getting in on this, we will be taking some small steps to investigate what “community groups” ARE and what they are NOT. It will be a series of five sessions to read and discuss a very simple and clear book that addresses what “community groups” are all about. One or two pilot groups are getting underway this summer, and more is better! Contact Kyle at kyle@flcal.org if you want to get in on this.

Church on the Move

Do you like to exercise? Do you like to exercise outside? Do you think it would be good to exercise in some new and fun ways—like being a kid again? Do you think it might be fun to do this with a group of others? Maybe you don’t like this idea at all. That’s fine! I suggest giving it a try once, though...For an example of one of the most well-known such gatherings, see here: http://www.november-project.com

So if this interests you, come to Church on the Move. First time out will be Saturday, June 21 @ 8:00 AM. This is for people of all levels of exercise. No need to feel intimidated! Just have a desire to come out, let loose, and have fun exercising your body, mind, and spirit.

We’ll meet at Morin Park just south of the church building. This is for adults, but if you want to come but can’t without bringing your kids, then bring them too. We’ll have child-care. We’ll walk up to Prairie Winds afterwards for breakfast or coffee.
ALPHA-BETA
This Fall.

The “Alpha” program has been a successful and enriching program for growth in faith and discipleship.

It began in the UK, and has grown to a nearly world-wide adult program that has been helping change the lives of regular church goers of all ages (teens through 100). It is great for introducing people to central elements of faith. It is great for people who know the Bible inside and out who want to go deeper. People at any level can benefit. It is a low-key, non-intimidating, and comfortable way to investigate and grow in your understanding of God, Jesus, and the life of faith. It is also a great way to grow together with others, to get to know others, and to learn how faith is important to others around you. This fall at FLC, we’re offering a modified version of Alpha. It will be “Alpha-Beta.” It may or may not be better than the original Alpha. It will just have some slightly different emphases. Be looking for more information!

We also need people to help be small-group leaders (read: discussion facilitators) for Alpha-Beta this fall. Don’t be worried! You DO NOT need to be an expert in faith or the Bible. You only need to have an honest desire to participate in the Alpha-Beta program. Contact Kyle for more information at kyle@flcal.org

Some Other Upcoming Events

Friday June 20th and Saturday June 21st: A great time for those of you who like to plant, dig in the dirt, etc. Great for kids! We need your help to landscape the south parking lot! Bring your tools. Be ready for some work and fun. Friday evening from 4:00 through 8:00 and Saturday from 10:00 AM until ??? We will provide dinner on Friday and lunch on Saturday. Probably burgers, dogs, and brats, and some other stuff also.

August 14-15: Global Leadership Summit at Crossroads Church. This is a great opportunity to be encouraged and challenged about what it means to be leaders in our world today. We are all leaders; only some of us exercise that role regularly. Let’s get energized to be better leaders in our world as people of the gospel! This is a free event and a great chance to get to know others in Albert Lea and from FLC. It is a great opportunity to connect with others. Contact Kyle Fever, Chad Adams, or John Holt if you are interested. You don’t want to miss this!

Fight Cancer! August 8th is the annual RELAY FOR LIFE here in Albert Lea. If you have been affected by cancer in any way (you personally, you now someone, a family member, etc.) you can participate! We want to get some teams together and raise as much money as we can to fight cancer. It is part of our call as God’s people to work against the evils of this world. Let’s join together! If you are interested in being on a team, or in heading up a team, contact Jill Johnson at jill.johnson@alschools.org or Kyle at kyle@flcal.org. It’s a great event! Hope to see you there!