

Caldwell in 25 years...

Good morning. Today I am going to share some dreams for how Caldwell might grow in the future. In 25 years we will all be a bit wiser – I will be older than John is now – and babies Jordan, Kleinman and Shumaker will have finished up college. Even our little Ellen will be pushing 30. Without a doubt, the people of Caldwell will continue to inspire and do good works.

Caldwell is a church filled with passionate community advocates and we stand out in Charlotte because of the way our faith moves us to action. For me visions for the future often start with the “why?” instead of the how or what. It is not difficult to come up with a list of the problems facing our society and probably each of us here this morning have at least a few issues we hold close to our hearts that we are already devoting energy to improve. The “why” is because our world, while wonderful, and our local community is still plagued by injustices, struggles, and suffering that we can impact and improve.

I envision our church being a community leader in the mission work we support and carry out locally and globally. Certainly poverty – 1 in 4 children and over 15% of our country - is critical challenge to our nation, state and city. I believe in the power of collaboration and also that everything you need is already within you. Recently I read about the Family Independence Initiative, a nonprofit with a purpose of encouraging low-income families to form small groups and help each other figure out how to get ahead. Partnerships with families across the country have proven that when self-determination is supported families can leverage their capacities and knowledge to improve their own economic and social mobility. The director says the key is that people feel in control, and they're encouraged to show initiative. It creates the type of sharing of funds, ideas, and connections that has been successfully used

throughout our history by immigrants and other disadvantaged groups to move from extreme poverty to economic security.

So maybe we are sharing our social capital, being advocates and champions for low income families to have greater access to resources, giving microloans, making seed money available, providing car or vanpool options to those without reliable transportation, maybe we generate and operate a transitional housing ministry, support effective education reform and schools that close the achievement gap, form HOPE teams – providing mentoring, support and encouragement to a family working to move towards stability. I see us expanding our community gardens to provide more healthy local food to our neighbors and supporting social entrepreneurship. All because we have a calling to work towards economic justice.

I see us continuing to work for Human Rights: Immigrant, refugee and LGBT rights and continuing to be intentional about our mission of welcoming everyone – and making everyone feel welcome - with a variety of multicultural worship services. It could look and sound like services with rhythm of drums, words of storytellers, voices of many languages, and vibrations of the organ. Or maybe it is reaching out beyond the walls of the church and holding fellowship events or bible studies out in the community because not everyone in search of a deeper faith is comfortable with the idea of being under a steeple. Even beyond that it could look like expanded travel, service and worship across the state, country, and globe. It will be a beautiful day when our sanctuary can be proud to be a place of equality, when our state's recent setback is overcome, and we are able to host and celebrate marriages of same-sex couples. It is a collective voice of our congregation saying that we are all, in

some way, “the other” in this melting pot and each of us is determined to live in a place where discrimination is very rare and universally offensive.

We can plan accessible activities each month such as coffee houses, dances, and meals that are welcoming to potential new church friends and families. In the very near and distant future I hope that our congregation is able to do more rounds of 4x4 conversation groups. Taking the time to listen to a person’s story is a truly powerful thing. For me it was not only a chance for fellowship but allowed me to get to know and better understand the adventures and stories of strength, adversity and triumph that weave together to make the tapestry of our congregation so vibrant.

As the group of young people in our church grows larger and larger I envision our youth program expanding to include more teen and family activities on Sunday and throughout the week. We could encourage our children and youth to help lead worship and organize a variety of local and regional mission based activities. Expand confirmation classes and create more opportunities to engage in conversations and experiences to deepen their developing beliefs and Christian values. Our youth are so creative that there are no limits to what they will accomplish.

Just as many of the stories Beth told surprised us, made us smile with pride, and even sigh in embarrassment so will the stories someone will stand up here and tell about us in 50 years. We will do some grand things and some small things that make a very real difference and we will likely even be responsible for some things that make us wish we had rewind buttons. In the next 25 years I hope we are able to deepen our relationships with one another, our community, and those who suffer in our world. Our church is a group of changemakers and thankfully we are, always have been, and will continue to be led by a God with abundant grace.