

# State of the Church Address 2009

## Selected Scripture



As our church fiscal year comes to an end, I will, as I have in the past, deliver a “State of the Church Address”. We are on the threshold of a new budget year and more importantly, a new season of ministry opportunity and potential.

A State of the Church Address is a combination of an annual review and a declaration of faith for the future. It is also a good time to rehearse our mission and evaluate our ministry in the mirror of God’s word.

We have included several hundred new people in our church in just the last twenty-four months. The last time I delivered a State of the Church Address, in fact, was two years ago. For those who have begun to attend this church in the last two years – you are the reason we had to go back to three services!

It is so important to rehearse certain truths not only because we are constantly welcoming new people into our flock, but because those of us who are old sheep are no different from the Israelites of old who constantly needed reminding. God even had the Israelites use visual reminders – like twelve stones piled up on the bank of the Jordan to remind themselves and communicate to their children that God parted the water of the Jordan as He led them into the Promised Land. These twelve stones were taken from the dry river bed to serve as a reminder that God had been faithful and God would continue to be faithful as they, and we, follow Him (Joshua 4:3).

Paul wrote to the Roman believers,

*... I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God (Romans 15:15)*

To the Corinthians, he wrote,

*For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach*

*everywhere in every church.  
(I Corinthians 4:17)*

Paul wrote directly to Timothy and said,

*For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you . . .  
(II Timothy 1:6)*

Even the apostle Peter wrote,

*Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them . . . (II Peter 1:12)*

This annual review of our church is a wonderful time, as Peter wrote, to rehearse what we know already, but need to be reminded of. So, let me invite you to turn to the testimony of an effective first century church that was actively following the Shepherd. Turn to I Thessalonians chapter 1.

I personally love the Thessalonian spirit and testimony. I get charged and enthused all over again about the ministry of the local church when I read of the devout faith in Christ of this flock. Look at verses 2-10.

*We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers;*

*constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,*

*knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you;*

*for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.*

*You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,*

*so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.*

*For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.*

***For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,***

***and to wait for His Son from heaven . . .***

Do you want to read the testimony of an effective local church? This is nothing less than the description of a church that is:

- God pleasing,
- holy living,
- idol discarding,
- gospel delivering,
- passionately serving,
- Bible believing,
- Spirit empowering,
- Christ anticipating.

The members of this church were not as much driven by these qualities as they were simply following Christ.

There is nothing in this testimony about worship style or economic class; there is nothing in this about being relevant to pagans or being inoffensive to idolaters.

This is why Paul, in this letter, would later write of these believers,

***. . . you are determined not to please men but God . . . (I Thessalonians 2:4 paraphrased)***

In Arlington National Cemetery, overlooking Washington, DC, is the tomb called the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. It has been perpetually guarded by our military for decades. When the new guard takes his post, he hears the command that has been delivered since the guard was posted long ago. The words of the command are simply, “Orders remain unchanged.”

*Orders remain unchanged.*

Jesus Christ commanded the men who would lead the early church and deliver to her the same commission.

***Go . . . and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . [and] teaching them . . . (Matthew 28:19-20)***

This is the great commission – but unfortunately it can be called the great omission because so many no longer engage in it.

In Matthew 28, our Lord commanded us to go and while we are going, to make disciples and

baptize them and teach them. We are simply to evangelize and edify, evangelize and edify, evangelize and edify. . . – to deliver the gospel so that people can hear and believe it. As Paul said,

***. . . how shall they believe in [One] of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher [messenger]? (Romans 10:14 NKJV)***

Our orders remain unchanged. While the church in every generation adapts to its culture, its language, and its freedoms, her orders remain unchanged.

So, whenever we take stock as a local church, we have to ask the questions:

- How are people being reached for Christ?
- How are people being built up and taught as believers?
- How are people being organized and resourced to reach out to the world, not only the world inside the church community, but the surrounding world, with the saving gospel of Jesus Christ?
- How are the facilities, the resources, and the people being maximized to evangelize and edify?



To mention the children's ministries of our church is to deliver a thank you to so many who volunteer.

We have at least 1,500 children under the age of thirteen involved throughout the week at our church services and events. These ministries, from nursery and Sunday school to AWANA, involve more than 525 volunteers on just Sundays alone.

The children's ministry launched further this year in reaching out to special needs children. When the program was started, there were two children involved. Now, there are about twenty. Even a special needs AWANA club has been created. Pastors and church leaders have begun calling for information and advice on this ministry – from California to Colorado to Vermont.

Two hundred fifty women showed up at our church yesterday for a retreat for mothers who home school their children. Currently our Children's

Pastor, Pastor Scott, oversees a home-school ministry that allows parents from more than fifty churches in our county and beyond to come for specialized classes, sharing together, and finding encouragement.



Student Ministries has really been picking up steam under the leadership of Pastor Aaron, who took the reins less than a year ago.

This ministry continues to develop in our teens much more than just to “graduate from high school without doing anything dangerous”. They want to develop passionate followers of Christ, involved in life-on-life ministry, mission’s trips, peer ministry, and outreach.

A new ministry opportunity for this coming year for special needs teens and young adults has also been eagerly accepted by the student ministry leaders. They are hosting an annual festival of activities that they are calling, “Cruising the Blue Marble”. I had no idea what this meant until I asked and was told that the theme is a cruise ship and the blue marble is a reference to the earth. So, Pastor Aaron is serving as the captain of the event, with lots of volunteers to host 500-plus families who will come to this church to give their special needs son or daughter a special evening which will include the gospel.

I saw the poster advertising this event and thought you might like to see it too.



This is Pastor Aaron. I do not know where he got the outfit and hat. He is obviously the most handsome pastor on our staff – I heard he is trying out for *Love Boat Reunion!*

Aaron is a gifted preacher and teacher of God’s word. The student ministry is now averaging between 440 to 480 teenagers and volunteer staff in the word on Sunday mornings. Many of these are

involved in outreach ministries and weekly Bible studies.



Adult ministries focused this past year on casting the net for men who wanted to develop as godly men in their homes, their businesses, and in their relationships. Pastor Don Sandberg organized a Saturday retreat and more than three hundred men gathered together for training. Out of this came training for deacons, elders, and men in general who wanted to develop a higher standard of distinctive Christian living. I praise God for all that is happening around this church, not just with the hundreds of women who are engaged in all kinds of Bible study and mentoring ministries, but with the men as well.

Two new Adult Bible Fellowships started this past year. If you are not connected to an ABF, start visiting them – we have twenty from which to choose.



Pastor Don also oversees and teaches the college class which has really grown this year, taking shape with a calendar of activities, trips, and Bible study opportunities.

Don told me that one particular ministry that has really taken off is premarital counseling. The requests for the use of our facility for weddings have also increased. He has recently locked in several weekends on the calendar so we can have weddings around here.

In the last year or so, eleven couples have been or will be married that actually met at our church. Is that not exciting? Singles can use eHarmony or come to Colonial!

Those who met at our church and are engaged can attend a marriage conference, once married, that Care Ministries has planned for June to strengthen and encourage our couples.



Care Ministries is under the leadership of Pastors Walter Ross and Stephen Pritchett. These pastors continue to work long hours counseling, visiting, and encouraging the saints who are hurting, as well as taking opportunities to reach people with the gospel of Christ.

Walter wrote in an email to me this past week, a phrase that I thought cut to the core of our redemptive purpose as a church. He wrote, “The most exciting thing in Care Ministries this year has been the way the Lord has transformed adversity into open doors for ministry.”

This has been a challenging year financially for many in our family and Care Ministries oversees our church benevolence fund. From donations to this fund, Care Ministries distributed 52,000 dollars this year.

Our Jobseekers ministry to connect men and women who have lost their jobs has grown exponentially on our campus. Every Monday in the past, about twenty-five would gather for devotions, prayer, and networking together. Now, this ministry is encouraging and networking 250 people who show up from all around this region. I was even told this past week that one Fortune 500 company is actually telling the people they have had to let go about this ministry at our church and encouraging them to attend.



In a strategic effort to serve our growing body of believers, we have recently organized our church family into seventy-two geographical areas with each area served by one of our seventy-two deacons. We have created these FLOCKS according to surrounding neighborhoods, so you have been grouped together with thirty-nine households in your immediate area.

Our prayer and plan is to connect everyone with their FLOCK by having a couple of fellowship opportunities each year. You will be receiving a

phone call from a deacon over the next few weeks, who will introduce himself and let you know when the fellowship time for your FLOCK has been planned.

We now have FLOCKS organized all over this county. I am so excited to know that people will be connected with others who drive from their area. We have FLOCKS organized in regions in which people are driving to this church from Cary, Raleigh, Garner, Apex, Morrisville, Knightdale, Zebulon, Angier, Pittsboro, Holly Springs, Fuquay-Varina, and even Chapel Hill – we only allow so many of them in! Friends and visitors are driving here from Sanford, Lillington, Carrboro, Durham, Willow Springs, and Pinehurst. I have been told in the last week that we have two families that drive an hour one way from Pinehurst. How many of the golfers here want to be in their FLOCK?

If you want to know more, go to [colonial.org](http://colonial.org) and click on the FLOCKS page to have your questions answered about this new initiative.

Why do people make the drive to this church?



I believe, like the healthy church in Thessalonica, the people who come to this church love the written word and they love to worship the living Word, our living Lord.

In a church culture that has abandoned the rich hymns of the faith, along with the mass choir and the orchestra, we are committed to and enjoying all of these. More than two hundred adults are involved in our choir, orchestra, and a variety of other offerings.

I was copied on an email recently in which a woman was saying that if you come to Colonial, the services are clearly dedicated to the glory of a holy God. What a wonderful thing to be able to say.

Worship ministries, under Pastor Loftis, now has over two hundred children learning how to be worshipers in their graded choir system. The Hearts, Hands and Voices children’s choir has sung in our worship services in recent days. What a delight to hear these children sing – and they are also fun to watch! In fact, they are planning for a spring children’s musical entitled, “We Like Sheep”.



In order for our church to be a God-pleasing church, we must be reaching out to our world with the gospel – through a variety of methods and opportunities. We continue to train people in evangelism. This past year, we had many people pray to receive Christ, confessing their sin and turning to Him as their Lord and Savior.

One of the most effective outreach ministries of our church continues to be Sports Ministries.



In this ministry, there are about 2,000 children and adults registered to play basketball, soccer, flag football, t-ball, martial arts, volleyball, softball and more. Two hundred adults serve as coaches.

Each practice includes a devotion time. This past year we saw one hundred young people and ten adults make a profession of faith.

This past week, a gentleman walked in to sign up for a sports league and was connected with one of our staff members. This staff member was able to share the gospel with him and he received Christ as his Savior.

The exciting thing about our Sports Ministry is that 50% of the participants do not attend Colonial and hundreds of families come to our campus that are unchurched. Many of these parents are now involved in helping their child memorize scripture verses – this redefines sowing the seed.

By the way, tomorrow night is the award night for Upward Basketball. Last year, seventy-five children and adults trusted Christ as their Savior.

I have learned in the last couple of weeks, of a new sports outreach called Outdoorsmen. This is a ministry outreach primarily for hunters – guys who wear camouflage to Wal-Mart; guys that you want on your side. Forty-five men attended the first meeting. These are not meetings in which bagels and cream cheese are served – at the first meeting, they ate duck meat and deer chili – is this great or what?!

I talked to Ed Strickland about this new ministry outreach that he has launched and said to him that of all the sports ministries, he actually has the perfect verse. In Acts 10:13, God commanded the apostle Peter in the vision of acceptable animals to eat, “Rise, kill and eat.” How is that for a theme verse for hunters?! This is the perfect verse for outdoorsmen, is it not? Rise, kill and eat.

Ed said to me the other day, “Do you think people are going to be offended by this outreach ministry – what about PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals)?”

I said, “Ed, you know how deeply sensitive I am to offending PETA. Don’t worry about it. I’m sure there are people at Colonial who only eat vegetables – that’s their fault. They’re going to die one day and discover when they get to heaven that they could have eaten so many wonderful things. They would have lived just as long, and if they didn’t live as long, they would have died happier!”

So, go for it, Ed – Outdoorsmen away! And get a really good logo developed by our Communications Team.



This leads me to say that part of Colonial’s outreach that involves edification and evangelism is our own Communications Team of creative artists, writers, photographers, videographers, volunteers and staff.

This past year, in an effort to cut costs, this team took our *Connections* magazine online. When the newest issue hit our website, nearly 2,000 people had read it within two weeks and 1,500 people had downloaded it to print for themselves.

Communications does all our printed materials, logos, brochures, banners, videos, our web site, and stand up sheep in the lobby. All are done in-house and they do a fantastic job, amen?

Let me quickly mention more outreach opportunities that are growing.



Shepherds Theological Seminary continues to develop. The seminary was birthed and is housed on our campus. It continues to experience exciting growth. This past year, the part-time and full-time student body grew 20%. It also moved its library into a new seminary library, now with 40,000 books, journals, and other resources.

We are trusting the Lord for a completion of the accreditation process in 2009 and achieving full accreditation. This is a remarkable accomplishment, especially given the fact that Shepherd's Seminary began offering its first classes in 2003.



Many old timers here remember our earlier vision of creating a missions cooperative with churches we planted. We called it the FAITH (Fellowship of Ambassadors Impacting the Harvest) Association.

Over the past ten years, we have been involved in planting four churches. Three of these did not reach self-supporting status and eventually merged with different churches in the area. Their pastors are now involved in different ministries.

Our fourth church partnership – Redeemer Community – is now self-supporting. Josh Wredberg told me this past week that they have had to order more chairs as they are now averaging 150 people each Sunday. And these believers are supporting him full-time.

Something interesting really began to develop this past year. Established churches have contacted us for advice, support, and encouragement and we began to talk about including existing churches in the FAITH Association. In the last six months, the FAITH Association has been unpacked from moth balls and we have established partnerships with seven churches in our region, with two more churches in the process. These pastors will serve with me on the Pastors Advisory Council for Shepherds Seminary, their parishioners and staff can attend classes at

discounted rates, and our seminary students will fulfill their internship requirements at these churches.

So far, the pastors who have joined with me as members of FAITH are Community Baptist in Reidsville, Cornerstone Baptist in Wilmington, Graceway Bible Church in Angier, Redeemer Community in Fuquay-Varina, Southbridge Fellowship in North Raleigh, Twin City Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, and Wentworth Bible Church in South Raleigh.

All these pastors have joined in the last six months, independently of one another. The Lord is obviously pleased with the creation of an association of likeminded pastors. I will keep you posted.



Another outreach ministry beyond the scope of our campus and immediate ministries is Wisdom for the Heart. This is the radio and resource ministry based on our messages. It is not funded by Colonial's budget, although many people at Colonial donate to it.

This year, we will finally begin broadcasting a separate Spanish version of the program in the capitals and major cities of countries like Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela and more. Eighty-nine radio stations will begin carrying our program beginning in June and we are praying for a great harvest of fruit for Christ.

This is the passion of the Thessalonians – to live in such a way that the gospel of Christ would advance by every possible means and through every possible avenue. We want to do the same.

I shared at our recent Wisdom Banquet of the signature message that William Carey, who is called the Father of Modern Missions, preached on May 31, 1792, to a meeting of several churches that had come together to discuss the possibility of foreign missions. In this message, he exhorted them to take a step of faith for the sake of the gospel and send a missionary to India – an unheard of enterprise. They agreed, however, and actually emptied their pockets to begin the society for reaching the heathen in foreign lands. William Carey became this missionary.

In this sermon, Carey's theme was summed up in the phrase that started a fire, as he said repeatedly,

“Let us expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.”

What a balance there is in this statement. Trust God – yes! God must do it; God must empower it. However, we must serve God too; we must co-labor with Him. We must say with the Thessalonians, “Oh, God, use us to accomplish Your work and Your will!”

May this be our testimony as we launch into a new year of ministry.



Let me encourage you, my friend, to make this year a year of great attempts. Let me challenge you with three of them.

**1. Begin by moving from attending this church to joining this church.**

This is not a quick sales job for membership – you still have to attend twelve weeks of GreenHouse classes and there is nothing quick about that.

Sign on; make this house your house; make these people your family. Change your vocabulary from “I like this church” to “This is my church.”

Make the move from attending to joining.

**2. Make the move from observation to participation.**

Do not just sign on – sign up!

The 525 volunteers who will teach children today and hold babies and listen to kids recite their verses and make coffee and set up tables and wave batons at cars with drivers who ignore them – need fresh volunteers.

Make the move from observing to participating.

**3. Make the move from giving to supporting.**

There is a world of difference in the thought, “Here comes the offering plate – I need to give something” to “Here comes the offering plate – I want to support what’s happening.”

The first attitude puts in a tip. The second attitude thinks through an investment. Move from giving to supporting.

This is the spirit, testimony, and vision of the Thessalonians. This is the vision of William Carey and the movement his life began.

These are the ones who gave their lives to the true and living God, serving one another and reaching their city with the gospel. Their testimony rippled outward throughout the entire world.

May we, like these believers, do nothing less than expect great things from God and attempt great things for the glory of God.