



STREETLIGHT STATE OF THE CHURCH

In my younger years, as I was learning and growing in ministry, looking for the place that I belonged, I gathered a whole lot of experience in different contexts and working in different Churches. I worked in a Church with twenty people for free. I worked in megachurches that had anywhere from 1,000 people to 3,000 people. I worked part time. I worked full time. I worked in a Church replant that grew from 30 people to 200 people. I did ministry in rural, suburban and urban New England. I did ministry in suburban and urban Ohio. I helped to plant this Church that we now call Streetlight Community Church and have been here since April of 2016 when we started. I started as a worship leader and secondary pastor at Streetlight, and became the lead pastor in September of 2019. We went through redeveloping a plant that had only been going for three and a half years and then had the original lead guy move on to another Church. Then, right after that, before we could get our feet under us, we went through COVID, racial, political and civil unrest, and the aftermath of 2020 and 2021.

And in all of those years and through all of those experiences, I learned that each context is different. I learned that each culture is different. I learned that each Church body in its context and culture is different. Each has different strengths and weaknesses. Each has different circumstances. Each has different struggles. This is why Paul's New Testament letters to Corinth are different from his letter to Galatia, Philippi, Ephesus, Collosae, and Thessalonica. It's an age-old reality that when you get a group of human beings together, even when they all claim to follow a perfect Savior, that a combination of the wonderful and the difficult will inevitably emerge.

So, all that to say, what we're talking about these next few weeks in January at Streetlight Community Church is unique. It's the beginning of 2024. The Direction Team recommended to me that we help all of you to understand the "State of Our Church". This may sound like a more formal and stuffy title to a sermon series than what we normally do, but it's certainly the best words we can use to describe it. We want you to know how Streetlight is doing logistically, financially, spiritually, and more. We also want to cast a fresh vision out of the scriptures for what we're asking the Lord for Streetlight to become in the months and years ahead.

First of all, we're a smaller urban Church with a niche in the neighborhood of Kenmore. Not all of the people that make up Streetlight are from Kenmore, but we all agree that we're here to do mission in the Kenmore neighborhood. As much as we want to participate in ministry to the broader city of Akron also where it makes sense, ultimately we're focused on being a faithful neighborhood Church in Kenmore.

It's important for all of you to know that at this point, Kenmore still has a bad rap in Akron like "Compton" used to have in LA in the 1990's, and like "Nazareth" used to have during the time of Jesus 2,000 years ago. Akronites hear the word "Kenmore", and immediately jump into a negative head space because of the history of drug addiction, violence, poverty, crime, and blight that has attacked this part of Akron particularly in the past fifty years. Just look at the comments under any really public social media post that mentions Kenmore and you'll see what I mean.

However, who gives a rat's behind what people say, Jesus loves Kenmore! Because of efforts by our Missional Allies First Glimpse, Just a Dad from Akron, JADFA House, Srina Coffee and Tea House, Ethicrace Clothing Co., Better Kenmore CDC, and many of us who make up the Streetlight Community Church, Goss Memorial Church, the Church on the Boulevard, Kenmore Nazarene Community Church, RCCG Jesus House Akron, and more, and because of all the Kingdom minded people that have fought for Kenmore through the years, Kenmore is on the up and up! New businesses have come into the neighborhood. There are people that genuinely care about this section of Akron and are fighting uphill to make it better and better. Many of us really believe in the idea of "revitalization without gentrification". We wanna see genuine good people revitalizing this neighborhood without marginalizing segments of its population!

We're into Isaiah 58:6-12, where the prophet writes by the Spirit from the perspective of the Lord speaking to His people, Israel;

6 Isn't this the fast I choose:

*To break the chains of wickedness,
to untie the ropes of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free,
and to tear off every yoke?
7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
to bring the poor and homeless into your house,
to clothe the naked when you see him,
and not to ignore your own flesh and blood?
8 Then your light will appear like the dawn,
and your recovery will come quickly.
Your righteousness will go before you,
and the Lord's glory will be your rear guard.
9 At that time, when you call, the Lord will answer;
when you cry out, he will say, 'Here I am.'
If you get rid of the yoke among you,
the finger-pointing and malicious speaking,
10 and if you offer yourself to the hungry,
and satisfy the afflicted one,
then your light will shine in the darkness,
and your night will be like noonday.
11 The Lord will always lead you,
satisfy you in a parched land,
and strengthen your bones.
You will be like a watered garden
and like a spring whose water never runs dry.
12 Some of you will rebuild the ancient ruins;
you will restore the foundations laid long ago;
you will be called the repairer of broken walls,
the restorer of streets where people live.*

But because of Kenmore's bad rap in Akron, the amount of megachurches that are in the Akron area, and the lack of Jesus followers studying and ingesting scriptures like the book of Isaiah, truth be told it's much harder to recruit people to the mission of Streetlight Community Church than it would be to say, the Chapel in Green, Compass North Church, or Grace Church in Bath. I mean, why would your average American Middle Class family come to Streetlight Community Church? We've got alright worship and preaching. We've got a decent kids ministry. But let's face it y'all- in the winter you gotta park and walk up an alley to get here, or in the late spring, summer, and early fall you'd come and sit outside, doing church right in the middle of Kenmore Boulevard! We care about people in this neighborhood that many Christians don't want anything to do

with, no matter how many times they read about Jesus caring about people like that. This Church ain't for the faint of heart. It's an invitation to the apostolically minded. It's a place for discipleship and mission. It's a cooking school, not a restaurant. It's a place for serious Christ followers to come, pour into one another, and reach people far from God and hold up the neighborhood with the values of the Kingdom. It's not an environment to create the next rage in Akron consumer Christianity. We partner with urban missionaries and invite everyone to participate in urban mission. That's a huge part of our identity as a Church Body in this particular place and time.

Did we make up all these motivations to be a bunch of freaks for Jesus in Kenmore? Nope. We got inspiration from people like the apostle Paul, who wrote; "My aim is to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named, so that I will not build on someone else's foundation, but, as it is written, Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand." (Romans 15:20-21) There are plenty of Christians in Akron looking to consume the best Sunday experience around. There are a handful of Church leaders looking to create the best Sunday experience around. We're not trying to compete with those people. We're willing to risk our comfort, status, and reputations to try and reach people that aren't being reached with the hope of Christ in Akron. We don't care about building on the foundations of the biggest religious institutions in our city. We care about "those who were not told about Christ seeing Him clearly, and those who hadn't heard about Him understanding who He is!" We want to see and be a part of a strong gospel foundation in this part of our city, and see an expression of the Church come to life out of it.

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus came near and said to (the disciples), "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

We wanna be a place where We Invite Everyone Into a Lifelong Relationship With Jesus. That's our mission. It's a paraphrase of Matthew 28:18-20. Evangelistically, we're a place for everyone- no matter what your political, moral, sexual, socio-economic, theological, racial, or religious background is. You can come as you are. You can belong here before you believe in Jesus. You don't have to "get it together" to be a part of our community. Everyone is welcome.

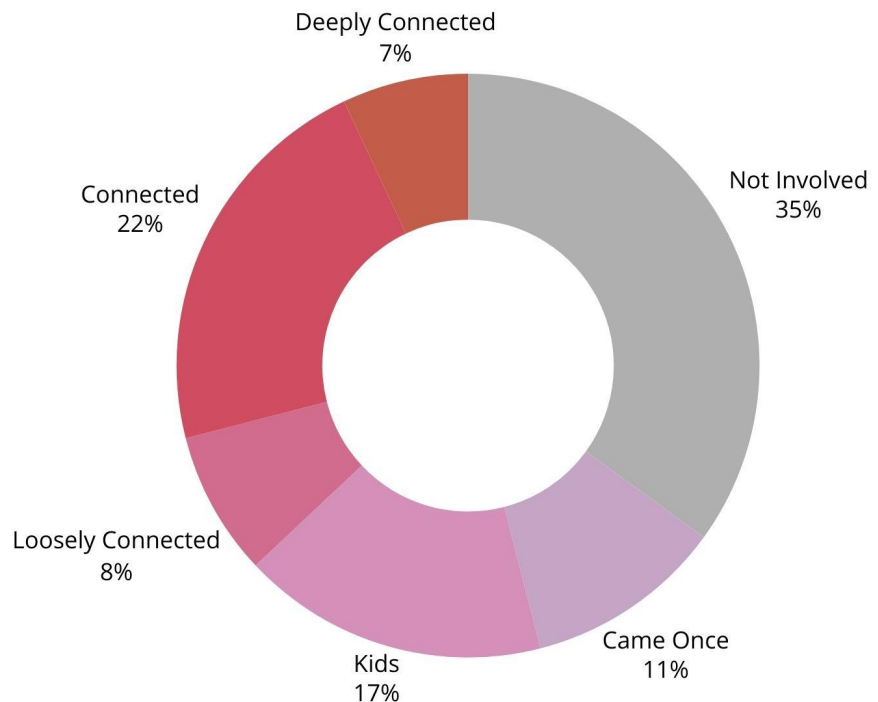
But ultimately, we want some of you to follow Jesus for the rest of your lives into eternity. We believe that Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, will do a better job of "getting you together" than you or we ever could! We're fully aware that we can't expect

everyone to respond in that way. This is why, in the parable of the wedding banquet, Jesus ended the parable by saying, “For many are invited, but few are chosen.” (Matt. 22:14) Jesus was saying that it’s the job of the Body of Christ- His disciples, to invite any and everyone into a relationship with Him, and that God would sort it all out over time and especially at the time of judgment. In Matthew 13:24-30, Jesus also gave the parable of the wheat and the weeds, where he talked about the fact that both those who belong to God and those who don’t will dwell together until God deals with pointing out the difference between the two at judgment.

So all that to say, the job of being the Body of Christ is destined to be a messy one! The ministry of Jesus was and is messy! Just read the gospels and you’ll see! It’s how it’s supposed to be.

So with all that in mind, now I’ll switch gears and share some logistics about the people who make up Streetlight Community Church...

All people in Street-light data-base



Out of the 183 people/entries in our database:

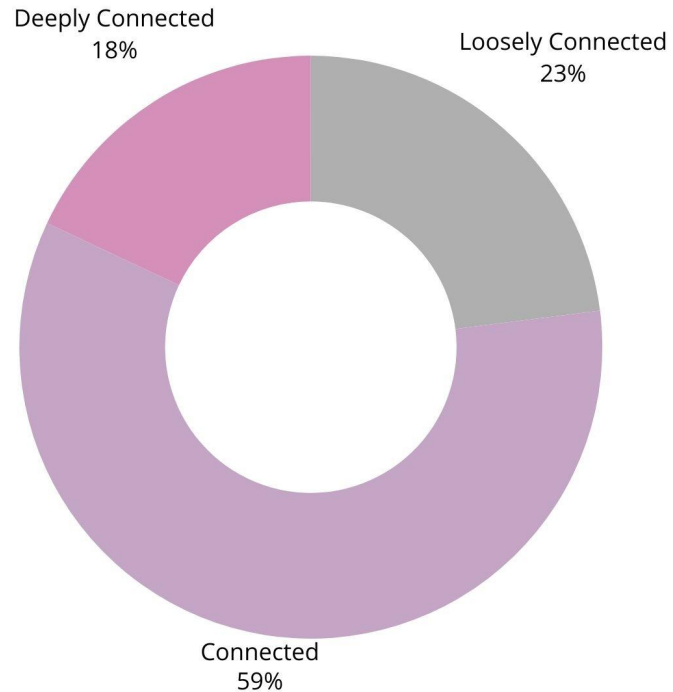
- 35% are not involved viscerally in any way with Streetlight except in receiving our communications in some form. (Though one of them tithes regularly but won’t come to be a part of Church in any way right now)

- 11% have attended our Sunday Gathering at least once but haven't come back. Many have been out of town guests connected to someone at Streetlight through family or friendship.
- **17% are kids**- which means they're under the age of 18 and officially come regularly to our Sunday gatherings/and are officially in the database.
- **8% are loosely connected people**- which means that they've been connected with a Streetlight DNA Group or our Sunday gathering more than a few times, but it's questionable if they'll stick or not because they haven't made any real commitment to our body.
- **22% are connected people**- this means that they're involved in a combo of the following ways:
 - They are in a DNA Group,
 - They give financially,
 - They serve on Sundays
 - They attend Sunday Gatherings at some level

However, they may do a combination of the things above, but they don't necessarily do all of them consistently. They are varied as well- some do two of the things above sporadically, some do all four of the things above but are consistent in two or three areas while being inconsistent in the others.

- **7% are deeply connected people**, which means,
 - They are consistently in a DNA Group, unless they're sick, out of town, or have a family emergency.
 - They consistently give financially
 - They consistently serve on Sundays
 - They attend Sunday Gatherings and only miss when sick, out of town or have a family emergency.

All “connected” Streetlight People



So if we whittle that info down and think about our adults who are loosely, regularly, or deeply connected to Streetlight, we could say that **23% are loosely connected, 59% are connected, and 18% are deeply connected.**

Number one- we love people in every one of these categories and want to be the Body of Christ for each person in each category! Also, people move between these categories. In fact, these numbers could genuinely change from month to month! But it's certainly a level of conviction about Christ, the Scriptures, and the Church that causes someone to remain deeply connected to our Church body for the long haul. Also- those who are deeply connected tend to remain deeply connected. People who are either loosely connected or just connected tend to move in the other direction.

It's important to say that we have a definite transient population that comes in and out of our Church, and these are people that we want to care for and be the Body of Christ to. This is a key part of being a neighborhood Church in Kenmore. Obviously a healthy Church body can't be built on a transient group of people, and additionally, transient people can't necessarily be quantified, so we have no way to count them. Sometimes we have one "transient" person on a Sunday, sometimes we have twenty! When we do community lunches we can have as many as forty or fifty! We expect to do, will continue to do, and want to get better at doing effective ministry to the transient "crowds"- people that pop in and out that we may or may not ever see again. When we read the gospels, we see that Jesus did valuable ministry to the crowds as well, but He spoke differently

to the crowds than He did to His disciples. In imitating Jesus, we're looking to do valuable ministry to crowds while building up disciples and consistently drawing the few called disciples out of the crowds and into a true faith journey with and towards Christ.

After all, Jesus loves us like crazy. Those of us who have been ransomed and bought by His broken body and blood shed know this! We know what it means to be forgiven of all our sins, and to desire a life of having our sins continually be dealt with and gradually more and more crucified and buried! We know that Christ rose from the dead and is going to return to judge the living and the dead! We know He's going to set up a perfect Kingdom on Earth! We know that the sinless, corruption-less eternity He has for us is way better than anything of this earth, so we live for it more than this earth! Amen?

And in the midst of proclaiming this message of fully following Jesus to a lot of random people that come in and out of our Church community, we do see people get impacted by the gospel! In fact, when I think of the value of the transient ministry we do as a Church, I think of David. David was a homeless man who lived on the streets but also ended up in a homeless shelter. He ended up coming to almost every one of our Sunday gatherings outside in the spring and summer of 2023, and we got to baptize him when we did baptisms on the boulevard in the early fall of 2023. He told us over and over again how much he loved our community and how happy he was to be a part of it. He then left the state and moved to Utah. Our ministry to cats like David is just as important in the eyes of God as discipling an upwardly mobile, committed, Church going family is, amen? After all, we sure don't want to commit the sin of favoritism that James, the half-brother of Jesus, talked about in James 2!

My brothers and sisters, do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. 2 For if someone comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and a poor person dressed in filthy clothes also comes in, 3 if you look with favor on the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Sit here in a good place," and yet you say to the poor person, "Stand over there," or "Sit here on the floor by my footstool," 4 haven't you made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Didn't God choose the poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? 6 Yet you have dishonored the poor. Don't the rich oppress you and drag you into court? 7 Don't they blaspheme the good name that was invoked over you?

8 Indeed, if you fulfill the royal law prescribed in the Scripture, Love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well. 9 If, however, you show favoritism, you commit sin and are

convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the entire law, and yet stumbles at one point, is guilty of breaking it all. 11 For he who said, Do not commit adultery, also said, Do not murder. So if you do not commit adultery, but you murder, you are a lawbreaker.

12 Speak and act as those who are to be judged by the law of freedom. 13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has not shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:1-13)

However, to create the critical mass and momentum needed to really bless everyone that ever becomes involved with us, we don't need more transient people, visitors, loosely connected people, or connected people. **We essentially need about 30-40 deeply connected people to make up a healthy core.** This would be approximately double to triple the amount of deeply connected people that we currently have. This is what we're praying for. This is what we'll be contending for. This would be a total game changer for our Church.

And some could say why wouldn't we pray for just more connected people? We're praying for more connected people as well as deeply connected people. In fact, we're praying for more visitors, transient people, loosely connected people, connected people, **and** deeply connected people! We'll take em all!

But let me explain why deeply connected people are what we truly need the most...

Why are deeply connected people so vital? The answers should be obvious. Having a thriving Church totally depends on committed people and volunteers. Deeply connected people hold the whole Church up when somebody steps down from a volunteer role for a season, or leaves town, or changes Churches. Deeply connected people prevent the Streetlight staff from constantly scrambling to fill roles and feeling overwhelmed. Also, deeply connected people are the ones that make all our gatherings filled with life so that people visiting would catch that momentum and vibrancy of the Spirit and want to come back and spread the word about what's happening here to the neighborhood. As a result, more folks would end up connected to a life giving relationship with Christ and the Church.

In the history of Streetlight Community Church thus far this has been the consistent pattern:

- We do well for awhile, and
- then hit a really rough patch,

- We do well again,
- Then hit a rough patch,
- etc. etc.

We obviously do great as a Church at reaching the transient population of Kenmore and “visitors” in a number of ways...

- Outdoor gatherings
- 4th Sunday Lunches
- Even the “pancake time” **before** the DNA Spiritual Formation Sessions ;)
- Being a safe space for neighborhood kids whenever we’re around on Sundays to come & hang out

However, we **need** 30-40 core people that are committed to start thriving as a Church body. It will change things.

So how are we going to go about **getting** these 30-40 core people in place?

- First, we’re going to pray. We’re going to pray that God would bring new people to the mission of this Church to improve what we’re doing. We want stronger discipleship, stronger mission, and a stronger witness in Kenmore! However God wants to bring these people and put them into place, we want to remain open to.
- Next, we’ll invite you to pray with us. If this desire to have these people is from Him, pray that the Lord would align all that He needs to align to make it happen to help His Kingdom thrive here in our midst.
- Next, we’re going to lovingly challenge all of you. Remember- we always want to make space for visitors, transient people, loosely connected people, and connected people. We love all of you!
 - But we’re also praying and encouraging those of you who just visit or pop in and out to consider coming more regularly.
 - We’re praying and encouraging those of you who are loosely connected to consider jumping into a DNA Discipleship Group, or serving in a volunteer role on Sundays, or starting to give more regularly, or starting to come on Sundays more regularly.
 - And most of all- to those of you who are connected but not deeply connected, we’re praying and encouraging you to jump in all the way. Commit, plan, schedule, and take action to come every Sunday unless you’re truly sick, out of town, or have a family emergency. Make your growth in Christ and mission for Him alongside this community a priority and not an optional possibility! Be an active part of a DNA Group and

chase after becoming a disciple maker! Give what the Lord leads you to give! Serve in a role on Sundays beyond just popping in once and a while! Don't treat your role here like a gig! Serve on some Sundays and then show up on all the other ones! What have you got to lose by just being all in? We'll all be happier if we really see this thing make an impact!

- And maybe even more- thank you to all of you who are deeply connected and truly care about Christ and this particular part of His Body that we call Streetlight Community Church. Thank you for your consistency. Thank you for discipling people. Thank you for your faithful prayer life. Thank you for your commitment to meditating on and living out the Scriptures. Thank you for counseling people going through difficulty. Thank you for being a witness for Christ to hurting and struggling people. Thank you for being wildly generous. Thank you for being here all the time in tough seasons and good ones, on low attended Sundays and highly attended ones, at smaller outreaches and bigger ones, at small neighborhood events and bigger ones- pouring into the people of God and pouring into the people of this neighborhood and community. Thanks for being such an unending encouragement to my family and I. Thanks for being honest with me and holding me accountable in the truth and love of Christ. You're the backbone of this Church y'all! You know who you are! I want everyone to celebrate you! I'm not trying to put you on a pedestal but I'm telling you right now- I wouldn't have survived leading this Church if it weren't for you! Thank you for leading the way in your faith and example!