

# EXPAND + + +

| PASTOR GREG GRIFFITH

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All right, church, I'm going to need you to be a little interactive to just start our message today. I want you to think for a minute about your most favorite franchises. You'll see a bunch of iconic ones appear, but just some of your favorite franchises. Now it could be a restaurant franchise, it could be a food or a drink franchise, it could be a store franchise, it could be an auto franchise, it could be a movie franchise. But I want you to shout out, shout it so I can hear it. What is your favorite franchise that you're like, this is the one I love? So go ahead, shout it right now.

Yeah, yeah, I know. I know. Franchises are great. And you know, here's what I know about franchises. The best franchises don't just survive, they actually multiply because they're so good. And today we're going to discover that God is calling King of Kings to do the same thing, to multiply. We call it expand.

We've spent the past three weeks reviewing and reigniting our last six months here of our capital initiative, Let's Go. We've talked about what it looks like to sustain ministries, meaning to continue to pour gas upon the ministries that we love and the ministries we have in this place. We talked last week about strengthening ministries, what it means to fully invest in our kids and our students and our campuses. And today we're going to talk about expanding our ministries. What's it look like to expand our ministries and multiply to campuses and to connect to the world?

And that's an important part for us because we believe that God has called us to say, let's go and expand our ministries, expand the good things that are happening in this local church to communities around the nation. You know, when I think about what it means to connect to the world, we often think about global missions. We think about what are we doing in Cambodia and India and Uganda and Guatemala and potentially Chile. Here's my understanding that I want you to get as well. It doesn't have to just be that.

When we talk about connection to the world, that's one facet. But you can have two truths that are equally true. And the other truth is when we talk about connecting to the world, we talk about connecting to your world right outside your front door, because we believe God has called us to expand. And that begins outside your front door in your neighborhoods where you live, work, play, and pray on a regular basis.

And we believe that God has called us to connect to the world in local contexts, in church areas where there is no church with the greatest explanation of the gospel that we understand in Lutheranism, which is grace alone, faith alone, by Scripture alone. And that there are churches in areas where they are closing and they don't need to close. And so how are we reaching those neighborhoods and those schools and those communities and continuing to expand the church with the greatest news ever, that the gospel of Jesus Christ, He died and He rose and He lives for them, not from anything that they've done, but everything that He's done for us.

King of Kings, since its inception in 1962, has always been a church that is a leader. And that's not to brag and that's not a boast. It's a responsibility that God has planted upon us. God has called us to lead in our denomination. And that is a mantle that we take seriously because what we do know about God is that when God gives a mantle to a church or to us, that if we're not faithful with it and obedient to it, that He will remove that mantle from us and give it to those who would do with it what He desires.

Tom Rayner, who is a church denominational expert, said this: Denominations do not exist apart from their churches. They reflect the health of a congregation within them. When two more churches are healthy than unhealthy, the denomination tends to have a strategic capacity. And when more churches are unhealthy than healthy, denominational leaders are pushed into triage mode rather than long term leadership.

Friends, I want to say today as a leader, as a church that's a leader in our denomination, we have an unhealthy denomination right now. But that doesn't mean that we give up and it doesn't mean that we sit on the sidelines and complain. We still carry the mantle that God has given us, which is to lead within our denomination and to lead where others aren't leading so that they may see that there is a path forward and a path towards healthiness.

Let me just share with you some data about some of the unhealth that God is leading us to try to lead through right now. In our denomination, we have 6,100 churches. Of those 6,100 churches, 45%, so about 2,745 of them, worship under 50 people per weekend.

Of those 6,100 churches, 900 of those churches have what is called a vacancy. They don't have a pastor. Of those 900 churches that are vacant, about 650 to 700 of them are unable to have a pastor because they're not financially viable enough to support a pastor or they have some issues that won't allow them to have a pastor there.

Of our pastors, there's about 350 or so pastors every year that leave the ministry due to retirement or due to some sort of issue that has forced them to leave their church and ministry. A couple weeks ago, both seminaries graduated about 180 or so, maybe 220 pastors to send into the field. You can do the math. There are not enough pastors to support the churches that are out there.

A couple weeks ago, as we sent out those 180 to 220 pastors, there were 76 or so congregations that asked for a pastor that were told, we don't have enough to give you, so there's not one for you. You see, this is an issue that confronts our denomination.

President David Davis of the Michigan District wrote in a blog: Don't wait for a pastor. He said, the LCMS is a large denomination, but it faces a compounding crisis. Vacancies are lasting longer. Pastors are serving well beyond what's considered retirement age. Smaller congregations are having to share pastors. The average church is quite small, nearly half are fewer than 50 in weekly attendance, and the pastor shortage isn't a future problem. It's already here, and it's accelerating toward 2030.

Why is 2030 a big deal? 2030 is a big deal because most of our pastorate is the boomer generation, and by 2030, most of them will either be in full-time retirement or not capable of being in full-time ministry or part-time ministry due to their age. And here's the truth. This isn't someone else's problem. This isn't a problem that we as a local church go, well, our denomination should figure this out. We'll just sit here and stay focused and do what we do.

God has given the mantle of leadership to King of Kings. That makes this our problem, which means that we must be a part of the solution, which is why we have come with what we believe that God has said, here is your mantle, here is what you're called to do.

And that is where we say we are called to expand our ministries, take the good things that are happening at King of Kings, and to say we will go where there is not a Lutheran expression of the greatest news of the understanding of the gospel on the face of the planet, and we will plant churches. Or we are sick and tired of churches closing and vacating with the greatest news of the greatest expression of the gospel on the planet. And so we're not going to allow that on our watch.

And so what we're going to do is over the next 20 years, by 2042, we want to plant or revitalize 10 congregations as King of Kings around our nation. That's the mantle and the call that we believe God has given us, which is why we've planted a church up in Northwest, which is why we revitalized a church in Fremont.

And Fremont was one of the 700 churches just two years ago, where they would not have been allowed to have a pastor due to their health and due to their financial issues. And we said, we're not going to let that close. God open a door. And that's where we continue to see that God has positioned us to love, to serve, and to reach those who are not yet connected to community in their very own neighborhoods.

Because we truly believe and know that the local church is the greatest expression of the hope of the world. It is. And it's right here in your local church. It's the Axe Church Alive, 2,000 years ago, is still here today. And King of Kings is that Axe Church.

We believe that the local church has the answers, the need, the community that is necessary in a community that is hurting. We believe that the local church is where people gather in a personal relationship with Jesus to come and to publicly support and walk and care for one another in their valleys and on their mountaintops.

I want to share with you a video from what the kids call a YouTuber. He's a guy that reaches out because he is in that age. He reaches out to the 20-somethings and the teenagers, and he reaches out with the good news and the gospel proclamation, and he shares the value and the importance of the local church. So check out the words from Bryce Crawford.

What is the church? Well, there's two definitions for the church. You have the universal church, and then you have the local church. The local church would be a physical church building with four walls and a roof where people gather regularly to worship God and love people and learn about the Lord and dive into scripture.

Now, the universal church would be the body of Christ, Christians all around the globe. So as a born-again believer, you are a part of what is called the universal church, which is believers all around the globe united under one truth, worshiping the Lord Jesus Christ.

The local church is important, and I'm not just talking about the universal church here. I'm talking about the importance of the local church. Should you be attending?

I used to be one of those people that says, no, you don't really need the local church. It's all about just you and your relationship with God, and then you'll be set in stone.

I'm going to be completely honest. That mindset that I used to have was a mindset that wasn't grateful, and that was overlooking the importance and weight of the local church. The local church is the continued expression of the axe church 2,000 years ago.

And in the axe church, what did the axe church do? They went and they planted house churches throughout regions and throughout cities. They went to areas that were messy, like Corinth, and they allowed to walk through the mess. And Paul had to write letters about not hoarding all the communion.

And they did that because they were reaching those who don't yet know Jesus. And they were putting them in their context and in their areas, and they were raising up within themselves pastors and people and deacons and elders and deaconesses to go out and to share the good news of Jesus and to have these house churches.

And they were meeting them in their neighborhoods where they live, work, and they play. And they were innovating with that time and that area and all the technologies of that time and that day.

And we fast forward 1,500 years later to Martin Luther, who Martin Luther, many ask the question, why did Martin Luther succeed? Like there were other reformers who were saying that Roman Catholicism had fallen away. Why did he succeed?

Well, he succeeded because he used the innovation of that time. He had this deep desire and this deep belief that the word of God should be in the hands of the people of God. And he knew that through the Gutenberg printing press, that the word of God could get into the hands of the people of God.

And even though he heard, oh, don't trust the people. They're not going to understand the scriptures. They're going to confuse it. They're going to say the wrong things. He said, no, the word of God is to be taught by the heads of the household to the children of God.

And then they come to church where they receive the continued preparation for what the word of God, an explanation of what the word of God says. And he used that innovation to bring about a reformation that you and I stand upon still this day.

And our LCMS church body has always been an innovative church body. It was innovative in its seminary formation in the forties. It was innovative in its desire to have circuit riders, which were pastors that would go out and they would preach at local churches that didn't have pastors in them.

But what they would also do is they would equip the priesthood of all believers, the laity to do and have church on Sundays. And then they would come and they would share the word of God as a pastor. And they would encourage.

But the church was run by its laity. And that has been our church body's polity forever, until the last decade.

And we continue to step in as a local church using innovation, which is why we believe in video venue preaching to all of our campuses. It's why we look and we say that that we have campus pastors and directors relationally connecting with people and equipping and bringing men and women into scripture reading and into sharing the word of God and into prayers.

Because we believe in the priesthood of all believers, where each and every one of us is empowered, equipped and encouraged and then sent into the world in which God has called us to live, work, play and pray.

And that's who we are as a local church that loves our neighbors, serves our community and reaches those who believe the church is not yet for them.

It's why whenever we go into a new community, whether it's a church plant or revitalization, part of our strategy is that we will connect with a local public school.

Here at Millard, we're at Disney Elementary, in Northwest Standing Barrel Elementary and in Fremont Howard Elementary. Because we know that separation of the church and state is an American political system. It is not the will and the way of God.

God has actually called the church to be a blessing to the community which it's planted in. And so we want to come into our local public schools and we say to them with their permission to come in, can we just love you? Can we support your teachers, encourage your teachers, equip your teachers, pray for your teachers, watch over your teachers, cheer on your teachers?

Can we come alongside and can we serve your students? Can we be your greatest volunteers? Can we be the people that you call and say, I have a need and we say, here, let us meet it and do more.

Because we know that this is not about a program, it's not even a strategy, it's about a relationship. That these bridges between the church and the families become bridges for those families who have yet to come in and find their way in.

And so we do that because we also know that as we do this, wherever we go as the people of God, we go and we bring Jesus and the very presence of God. And when we bring Jesus, we bring the kingdom of God and his kingdom comes and his kingdom reigns wherever we are.

And this is just the word of God for Matthew 18 verses 19 through 20: Truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything and ask for it, it will be done for them by my father in heaven.

For where two or three gather, everyone say gather, in my name, there I am with them. Jesus goes with you. And so we go.

Because we also know that as we look to plant and revitalize churches, we have been sent. This is our laser focused mission that we have been sent with authority and power and purpose and this is not, this is not arrogance.

It is confidence because we know why we've been sent. We know what authority we have. We know the power and where it comes from and we know the purpose we have.

Now I want you to know about a passion I have. It's pizza. And I think I'm kind of an authority. I understand the dynamics of pizza and I have a purpose to eat as much as I can.

But there's one guy that actually does have this with pizza. His name's Dave Portnoy. And Dave, Dave does one bite, you know the rules, and he rates pizza all across the nation. He's done thousands of pizza ratings from pizza stores.

And Dave has only given out probably one or maybe two tens. He's on a zero to ten scale. Matter of fact, he says if you get above an eight from him, that's a monster score. And Dave has the authority that people watch him and follow him and then go to his pizza shops.

So he has the power and the ability to help that business succeed or give that business a poor rating. And he has a purpose of it's just he enjoys it and it's fun.

Dave has never been to Omaha to try the great Omaha pizza. But he has been to Lincoln for the University of Michigan and Nebraska game because he's a Michigan fan. And Dave did try Valentino's.

One bite, you know the rules. And his rating was a 5.4. And then he said some things about Valentino's that I'm not super comfortable sharing from the pulpit. So I'll let you go and insta-web all that and figure it out.

But here's what we know about us as a church that God has called us as a local church to do. We have the authority, meaning we have the mandate from Jesus himself to make disciples of all nations. This is our calling.

And so we are to go into communities and to make disciples, to reach people where they're live, work, play, and pray. And to reach them with the good news of Jesus.

We have the authority in this, or I'm sorry, the power in this, that this is a church that is not driven by our human strategy. That it is the work of the Holy Spirit that goes out ahead of us and before us.

And that Spirit is the one that opens the hearts and the neighborhoods and the minds and the ears to hear the good news. And that Spirit also goes within us to give us the courage and the time to winsomely and gently powerfully proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

And we have the purpose as a local church, which is to make heaven fuller, the kingdom stronger and lives greater.

And this is why we believe in what God has given to us as the mandate, as a calling. And we have the confidence to continue to go because we go with God.

And even though we don't have all the answers of where's next and what's next, we know God is already working on it. And we will fully surrender to where He leads us.

And in Ephesians 3, now to Him who is able to do immeasurably, everyone say immeasurably. More than we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory and the church in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen.

When we were approached by Fremont, who was one of those 700 churches that would not get a pastor, we had dreams of what God could do in that location. And God blew our minds away.

And when Fremont approached us, they had dreams of what could be. And God blew their minds away.

God did immeasurably more than either of us could imagine as He revitalized that church and turned that church from a church that was flagellating under 50 to today worshipping over 150 and thriving and reaching people who don't know Jesus.

But I don't want you to take my word for it. I want you to take a word from a family and from a young man who is looking for exactly what God would do immeasurably more than he could imagine. Let's hear from Jace.

As a family, we were all a little lost. Being a Good Shepherd, I felt kind of lonely. There wasn't a lot of kids that I could grow my faith with.

I did feel alone because there weren't really students my age there. Sundays were just Sundays. It wasn't necessarily checking a box off, but it kind of felt that way. It was just like, come to church and then leave. There wasn't more. It was just Sunday. And then we go back next Sunday, and that was it. My faith didn't really suffer, it just never grew. We were all craving more.

My name is Jace Johnston, and I'm from Fremont, Nebraska. I have lived here all my life. Growing up in Fremont has been a very fun experience. It's like a smaller town, so you know quite a bit of people.

Church has always been a big part of our life. We started going to Good Shepherd about seven years ago. We went to church every Sunday. The kids would try to go to Sunday school, but there weren't kids their age, if there was even any kids. They were in need of good Christian friends, and they were quite lonely.

I knew that a church could be really life-giving. There was so much potential, but there was nothing feeding that potential, and we were just withering away.

I also felt like my faith was suffering, because I didn't have the community that I could grow with. So when I found out that we were going to become King & Kings Fremont, I was so excited. We were going to have more people, more students, and I could have friends. There was hope again.

After the launch, everybody was just so warm and welcoming, and it felt like a true home. At King & Kings, I serve on the production team.

I attend student nights, and I go to small groups and connect groups, and I actually lead a Bible study at my home on Monday nights with the high school group.

I do have the community now. I get to use the talents that God gave me to do production, which is light, pro-presenter, audio, directing, all sorts of stuff.

And I also get to play like a home for students. We currently have 20 to 30 students coming every single week, and they're all super nice and kind.

There's several students that they didn't know Jesus when they came, and now they're here being leaders for our students and being a light.

That kind of stuff is what makes me want to come here every single week and lead student nights, is watching those success stories and watching those kids and those students be closer to Jesus.

Just seeing so many people in one room on fire for the Lord is just so amazing to see.

I can see a big change, drastic change in their faith, where they're very into it now. They're excited. They get up in the morning. Yeah, they're not like, oh, we gotta go to church again.

Jace is like, oh, when can I serve next? And Alyssa is the same way.

And they get disappointed if they're not on the schedule. Yeah, if they're not on the schedule, I'm like, wow, that's just amazing.

I'm just so grateful that God is bringing more people to church and giving me all the serving opportunities. I'm just so grateful.

Both Alyssa and Jace have really grown in their faith. They're totally different kids. They loved Jesus before, but now they love Jesus and actually show it.

I feel like my life has changed. I feel closer to God in all sorts of ways. I have friends that can walk in faith with me, and we all have Bible studies. It's really fun.

I love going to church now. I'm looking forward to it every single week.

Before King Kings, I kind of had a lukewarm relationship with Jesus. I wasn't nice to people. I didn't read my Bible. I didn't pray. I didn't really attend a church, and I believed, but as soon as we became King Kings, I feel like something just happened, and I'm just so more intentional about it.

It's a priority of mine. I just need Jesus. I want to lead people to Jesus. I want to pursue Him and just speak His name and speak His word, letting that be my career, making it my whole life.

I think it's amazing that King of Kings is real. They bring people to Jesus.

We watched our kids go from being lonely to being just Sunday morning box checkers to—

Now they shine.

They shine.

They really do.

They shine Jesus.

They shine the light of Jesus, and it's all because of King of Kings opening those doors for them.

And that's why we continue to lead through Let's Go, because we continue to see what God is doing and leading in innovation.

And it's not about numbers. It's not about number of campuses. It's about Jace and Alyssa and the Johnston family, because behind every number is a life.

That we know is greater and fuller when it's being fed to be a follower of Jesus.

And so as we plant campuses or revitalize them, they're not going to be identical because we know that they need to match the community they're in.

But they will be identifiable for who the DNA of King of Kings is, a church that I'm in love with, that's willing to do anything short of sin to reach those that don't yet know Jesus, that's open-handed with its generosity, its prayers, and its sacrifices, because we know the cost of not knowing Jesus, a church that is going to shout, show, and share the gospel in innovative and wonderful ways and be a pioneer for our church body and for others.

A church that lives Isaiah 6-8. I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send and who will go for us? And it echoes the same call of Isaiah, saying, let's go. Here am I. Send me. Send me.

And so this is our moment. Right here and right now is where we continue to press in because we have everything we need to lead with the mantle that has been placed upon us, to be a place that continues to expand for the betterment of the kingdom of God, and to go with the authority and the mandate of Jesus, with the power of the Holy Spirit upon us, and with the purpose to know what we're called to do, to transform lives, to connect to God, each other, and the world.

And we can only do that when we fully surrender.

And so as we sing this last song, I invite you to rise right now.

This song is called Fully Surrendered. It was written 18 months ago, and it was written by our worship team across a few of our campuses.

And it will be prepared to be released shortly, but it's sung here because we know when we fully surrender our lives, we can go and do what he's called us to do, to sustain, strengthen, and expand, to be leaders in our community, in our midst.

So I want to invite you to just lift your hands in a fully surrendered moment, because Father God, we fully surrender our lives, our will, our ways, our preferences to you.

We fully surrender everything to you, trusting in your will, your time, your ways, your preferences that no one would be lost, but all would be saved.

And so may that desire be our desire, that we would do anything short of sin to continue to reach those who don't yet know you.

We thank you for the gift of Northwest and of Fremont, the sacrifices that have been made.

We thank you for the future and the further cities that will come.

We lay our lives before you, trusting in you, as we're patiently waiting for you to continue to open doors, for your spirit has already gone before us.

May that spirit continue to give us guidance and wisdom within us.

And all God's people said, amen.