



Word Tabernacle Church | Office of the Senior Pastor | James David Gailliard

STATE OF THE CHURCH REPORT

May 7, 2024

To all Word-ites and Partners, grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. I am thankful to God for each of you. As I begin another Annual State of the Church Report, I remain grateful for all God has allowed and for the thousands of people that strive to accomplish the vision of this ministry. Please join me in reflecting upon the nine Word-ites that went on to be with our Lord in 2023. Their sacrifice, service, and support will be forever etched in the chronicles of our church history. For those of you new to this report, you are reading my heart in written form.

In many ways 2023 was a year of transition for us. Transition is defined as *“the process or the period of changing from one state or condition to another.”* In 2023 we were just getting our post-COVID equilibrium back. I want to remind us that we lost to death the highest number of Word-ites ever during the COVID era. In 2022 we funeralized sixteen of our family members. Meanwhile, in 2023 we added more people to the church than any time in recent history, a trend that continues now into 2024. That’s a lot of transitions. As I pen this report, I would like for us all to keep at the forefront of our minds that there is nothing we are doing that we must stop doing *and* that there isn’t anything we are currently doing that we must continue doing the way we are currently doing it. One way in which we maintain our relevance and momentum is by our willingness to make adjustments. Word is a strong, vibrant ministry. We are also a young ministry, an incredibly young ministry at nineteen years old. There are ten churches around the nation I’m routinely watching to see what they are doing, gleaning potential best practices and ideas. The average age of those churches is seventy-six. There are a few examples nationally of churches our age doing impactful work but invariably they are in larger cities and have large universities or military installations to help fuel growth. In many ways Word Tabernacle is a unicorn.

For us, what remains consistent is we continue to grow. Please don’t get me wrong. We also have a back door (meaning people leave our church) which is for me the most painful part of ministry. To be honest, in many situations, even more painful than losing people to death. I know that sounds extreme, but when we lose people to death there is a comfort and an assurance that they are indeed in a better place. Word is different than many churches because in our church the pastor gets close to the people. I have many friends and colleagues that in the time I have been with you, they have pastored two, three, and sometimes four other churches. Many denominations operate on an itinerancy system, moving a pastor from church to church, sometimes annually.

For me, **I cannot shepherd people without having a heart for them** – all of them.

Over the years, I have experienced the pain of members leaving – rarely theological or doctrinal reason. Sometimes it was because a friend left, others due to changing jobs, getting married or relocating to another city. In most situations it was an unwillingness to submit to authority, a disagreement over a secondary doctrinal issue or personal offense, none of which by the way are biblical reasons for leaving a church. Whatever the reason, people I loved and served, whose fellowship I enjoyed, with whom I had laughed and cried, left. At times they left in rapid succession, other times in a dribble here and there. These are the people whom we've married, funeralized their family members, blessed their babies, for whom we've written reference letters for jobs, provided character references in court, those we've employed, counseled, prayed for, encouraged when we are discouraged and yet, they leave. Sometimes they leave without ever saying goodbye. At other times they leave with an agenda to damage what God has blessed us to build, yet we keep giving our heart to everyone who remains and every new person that joins the ministry knowing that some of them, too, will leave. So, yes, we have a backdoor and I hate it. Like most pain, I get through it with scripture. In 2 Corinthians 4:1 the Apostle Paul writes– *“Therefore since, we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart.”* I refuse to lose heart because if I do, I'd become a heartless shepherd. So, I'd rather pastor with a broken heart than with no heart. As we move forward as a ministry it is my prayer that our back door gets smaller. It is also my prayer that for some who have left they will find their way back.

I digress. So, the challenge with continuing to grow is the bigger you are the slower you move and, the larger an organization, the more comfortable people become with slowing down. I have noticed that over the past few years, the older we become the more change adverse we become. There is an interesting trend, however, amongst elite athletes. Elite athletes are getting both bigger and faster. It is my desire that Word Tabernacle be an elite church. So, I view part of my responsibility and calling to inspire and motivate us to keep the momentum going and to understand we can be both big and on the move.

The result of these gains and losses means a fresh look at what we do and how we do it. As always time will not allow me to touch on everything of significance, but I do desire to highlight the following areas:

CHURCH DEPARTMENTS & MINISTRIES

The typical church has five areas of operations: worship, missions, evangelism, fellowship, and discipleship. At WTC we expanded that structure to The Impact Center Operations, C3 Success, Faith & Family, Community & Capacity, Performing Arts & Media, Campus Operations, Health & Wellness, Office of the Senior Pastor, Impact Pointe, and The Impact Academy. The logic behind this decision was to have independent yet collaborative centers that could simultaneously minister inwardly and outwardly, resulting in removing any conflict or tension between our members and the community, as both being ministered to equally. In other words, our structure allows us to be nimble enough to be both church and community focused. This is one reason we can state with confidence, *“Not everyone in the community belongs to Word Tabernacle, but Word Tabernacle belongs to everyone in the community.”*

PASTORS & MINISTERS

As your Senior Pastor, you would have noticed that we have begun elevating other Ministers to pastoral roles, specifically Associate Pastor, Next generation Pastor, Worship Pastor, Community Pastors and beginning next year E-City Pastor. I want to confess that this has been an arduous process for me because as a parent you do not trust just anyone with the baby. Scripture, however, informed my decision making on this issue.

In **Numbers 27:18-20** we find this account:

*“And the LORD said to Moses: “Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; **19** set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. **20** And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient.”*

All authority is first **divine** meaning it comes from God. That authority is **directed** meaning God gives His authority to someone. That authority is then **delegated** meaning the person having been directed the divine authority shares it with those who have **BOTH** the spirit of God and the spirit of the Senior Pastor. This sharing of authority creates opportunity for others and ensures that there are adequately trained people to carry on the work of the ministry so that God’s kingdom continues to grow. I am not saying I always get it right, but I certainly want you to understand the why behind the what. I am thankful to you as a congregation for how you have received our staff pastors and how you continue to trust the vision and leadership that God is giving me. As we move forward as a ministry, it is my prayer that God would continue to send us leaders with passion, character, work ethic, and competence.

MISSIONS

If you want an interesting conversation, ask people, *“What keeps you up at night?”* Granted, many people will respond with nothing but for me not seeing system level, catalytic change keeps me up at night. You see, as a student of the church, I have watched churches do extraordinary things in the name of Jesus. As a child I saw Pastor Leon Sullivan and Zion Baptist Church in Philadelphia build the first outdoor shopping plaza, build homes for teachers, and birth the Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC). I remember Pastor William Gray III from the pulpit of Bright Hope Baptist Church becoming one of the most powerful men in congress then going on to become President and CEO of The United Negro College Fund (UNCF). I was present for the ribbon cutting ceremony when Pastor James Hall and Triumph Baptist Church opened Victory Plaza which housed a grocery store and other necessary stores for the community as an addition to their credit union, school, and day care. I watched St. Paul Baptist in Brooklyn, NY, under the leadership of Dr. Johnny Youngblood, rebuild and revitalize a community with the Nehemiah Housing Project resulting in the construction of 2,300 single family homes. Then there’s Dr. DeForest Soaries who, while serving as Pastor of First Baptist Church, Lincoln Gardens in Somerset, NJ transformed his community with multiple mixed-use development projects, going on to become a highly sought after Corporate Director. I know, a long response to what keeps me up. **What keeps me up is the thought of living beneath my potential and purpose.** One of the more difficult aspects of being

your pastor is the effort required in convincing many of our members that great things are indeed possible. Luke 12:48 tells us “...*For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.*” I believe now, more than ever, Word is the best place for people who want to do big things or at a minimum want to be a part of something bigger than themselves. Please join me in prayer that God would send staff, leaders, Elders, Ministers, members, and partners who are willing and excited to make the necessary sacrifices for us to do remarkable things.

As I contemplated the many examples of church leaders who have gone before me and the agencies they founded, I began noticing some very disturbing activity among community-based and some faith-based agencies. First, I noticed that the mission was changing for many under the guise of some noble cause when they really had become their own mission in that they began existing for their own paychecks and community status. The other disturbing trend was the increase in tribalism. Groups were working less and less together, failing to recognize that when any development is disconnected, the areas being ignored reverse the good work that is being done. For example, having a focus on early childhood education is worthy but by not partnering with someone who has a food insecurity program minimizes the program outcomes. The next trend was that fewer and fewer churches were engaging in meaningful social action. The fourth trend was the increase in racial and political tensions resulting in funders moving away from agencies with strong Black leadership and policy positions that advocated for real equity. The anti-Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) narrative that is becoming increasingly popular has resulted in an irresponsible philanthropic culture that is most damaging to rural communities, faith communities, and agencies with robust infrastructures with the potential of becoming intermediaries to smaller agencies. The final destructive trend was the fabrication of outcomes by agencies claiming results that were simply not realistic nor honest. We are indeed living through a Matthew 24:24 fulfillment of prophesy, “*For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.*” All of this was happening while I was looking at the hundreds of thousands of dollars we were giving to charity and to many of these agencies, and I knew there had to be a better way. So, this is where the Areas of Engagement concept originated. The thought was we would use our financial and human capital to develop toolkits in key areas to foster a community-wide ecosystem of programs, policy positions, data sharing agreements and practical tools to give opportunity for all people to thrive. We began this transformative work in 2023 and I am happy to report much of this work is near completion. It is my hope that every Word-ite will embrace this vision, understanding that God cares about issues like educational attainment, homelessness, food insecurity, health disparities, economic equity, and civic engagement simply because God cares about people. As we move forward as a ministry, it is my hope and prayer that our newly formed foundation will serve as the operating agency addressing these and other issues.

CONVERGE

In 2023, we officially became a Converge Congregation. Converge is a movement of churches working to help people meet, know, and follow Jesus. Specifically, Converge will provide support to us in church planting, strengthening, and missions. Converge is a movement of Christians of all colors, cultures, and classes so I look forward to the diverse Biblical relationships it will afford us. For those that may not be aware, Word Tabernacle’s Doctrinal Statement is like a typical Baptist

church. Historically, we have viewed ourselves as “interdenominational” because along with our Baptist doctrine, we worship with a Pentecostal spontaneity with a structured and methodical liturgy. So, if we were to research our Spiritual Ancestry DNA as a church our 3 main origins would be Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal. If I were to just make up a word, I guess that makes us “Baptimethocostal.”

Converge churches come together around something greater than a compelling mission. What brings us together is Christ’s completed work on the cross. Because of the cross, we have forgiveness from our past, power for our present and hope for our future. As a result, we *converge* around the cross to take what Christ has done for us and make it known to others. The goal of Converge is to give every person the opportunity to hear the gospel, say “yes” to Jesus, grow in faith, be equipped to serve, and be sent out. What this means for you as a Word-ite is we will begin increasing our fellowship with churches from all over the nation. We will also bring in industry experts to preach and train and we in turn will be headed out to churches to assist them in their work in their respective communities. What is front of mind for me is working with Converge to help us craft a comprehensive national and international missions strategy.

TECHNOLOGY

You might have noticed that our worship environment is changing. There are audio, video and lighting enhancements that can be new and vastly different than most of us are accustomed to. To be clear, I grew up and was saved in a church with a pipe organ, pews (with no cushions), wood floors, modesty rails and a choir loft. There were very few microphones, and certainly no television monitors or screens. We sang our songs from a hymnbook, and I can still recall when we began using the sophisticated technology of an overhead projector. All of this has taken us to expanding the church's worship from musicians, vocalists, and hymnbooks to also include the technical arts. That’s a term I want all of us to become familiar with – **Technical Arts**. The Technical Arts is the application of sound, light, and visuals within our worship services. Let me share two passages of scripture to reflect on. As we reflect upon them, I want to challenge us to ask are these passages descriptive or are they prescriptive? In other words, are these passages giving us a formula on doing something a specific way or are these passages describing a situation that will change based on the context and the times?

Exodus 4: 2-4

So the LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A rod.” 3 And He said, “Cast it on the ground.” So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Reach out your hand and take it by the tail” (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand)...

Colossians 3:16

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

In this passage, some definitions will be helpful. *“Psalms”* represented the music of church and cultural history. *“Hymns”* introduced a new worship liturgy with a focus on praise, thanksgiving, and the character of God. *“Spiritual songs”* were spontaneous heart filled quickenings that were directed by the Holy Spirit. When put together this plurality of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs suggests that the method for worship is not singular and static but encompassing all artistic forms of worship aimed at praising God and building up one another. I have watched this evolution. I recall when there was no dancing in church. I recall the church fight growing up when drums were introduced in the worship service. Now, we have so much at our disposal to assist us in sharing Jesus. As your Pastor, I want to use every tool in our hand to expand God’s Kingdom. I especially want to reach this technological generation and I believe we will need digital resources to help us. When you place both these scriptures in our modern-day context, God is saying use what’s available to you. If a microphone is available use it; if an LED wall is available use it; if lights are available use them. The bigger question before us is two-fold. First, how do we do this in the way that is most accepting for all five generations of Word-ites and those we seek to reach with the gospel? Second, how do we train those who are involved in the technical arts that the role is much larger than a graphic, an array of lights, lower thirds or the decibels in the room, but just as someone “plays the keys” or “plays the drums,” their technology must be played, mastered, and utilized as a theological and liturgical tool for service to the church and the worship of a holy God?

2023 GOALS

Our 2023 Goals were outlined in six keys areas: Exalting Christ, Equipping the Church, Evangelizing Cities, Encouraging the Congregation, Empowering the Community and Expanding our Capacity. Although we experienced movement in many of these areas, we did not reach our full potential in any of these areas. The areas we made the most improvement were our baptisms, increasing fellowship, improving technology, youth and adult Midweek Bible Study/Worship attendance and the development of toolkits. These goals will continue into 2024 and can be viewed in detail in this Family Meeting document.

COMMUNION/BAPTISM SERVICE

Historically, as a ministry (up until COVID), we had a stand-alone ordinance service on the first Sunday of each month at 4:00pm. Now that we have added every Sunday an 8:00am & 10:00am worship service, we will return to that 1st Sunday of each month Ordinance Service but now at 2:00pm. During this 2:00pm service we will serve communion, baptize and new members will receive the right hand of fellowship. This 2:00pm service will begin on **Sunday, June 2, 2024**. This provides us with several opportunities. First, an opportunity for members from the 8:00am & 10:00am worship services to worship together as one family. Secondly, the opportunity for us to re-establish ongoing fellowships with other churches. As in previous years, dinner can be purchased on site so that those desiring to remain on campus can do so. Additionally, we will make food trucks available as this will be a great time to attend a small group, get to know those in our districts, have meetings and so much more. In our ministry's earlier days, this was almost always the best service of the month.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

This summer we will undergo a 5-year strategic planning process. We will seek to gain clarity on the specific people and groups we serve; the specific needs we meet; our highest priorities; what we do best; how we are unique and distinctive; how we want to change over the next several years; and the contributions we want to make over the next several years. We will announce staffing and structural changes that align with the 5-year plan then formally begin implementing the plan in January 2025. I do not know what the outcome of this process will be. We will be evaluating every part of our ministry, the REACH Center, The Impact Academy, outreach, missions, administration, potential LLC creation and much more. There are changes we need in day-to-day operations and ongoing ministry operations, but I want to be sure, so we have contracted an external consultant to help. I would ask the congregation to be patient while we complete this process, as we will commit to fewer partnerships and projects to ensure alignment with the final plan. For you as a member or partner, I would simply ask that every idea you want to share to please share it. It is my hope that once complete, the plan will be enthusiastically embraced by everyone.

E-CITY SERVICES

Three times per year (Memorial Day weekend, July 4th weekend, and Labor Day weekend) we take our services exclusively to the communities around the nation. There is no in-person option as we gather in planned watch parties at 12pm. This innovative approach to ministry was developed post-COVID, formally in 2023. It is my hope that every member will take seriously this opportunity to worship and fellowship in either affinity groups or districts. The flow and format of the worship service will be condensed to one hour with a format that is interactive and informative.

20th CHURCH ANNIVERSARY

Planning has begun for our 20th anniversary observances in 2025. It will also be my 25th pastoral anniversary year. There will be activities and events for everyone in our church and community. We are accepting ideas for a theme, so if you have an idea, please send it to me.

It is my hope that after hearing from our staff pastors and other staff members you are encouraged by what God is doing here at Word Tabernacle Church.

Whether you are a member or a partner, know that there is a strong Pastoral, prophetic and progressive spirit in our church. I believe in the people in our church. We are fully capable of radically changing the spiritual, cultural, social, political, and financial landscape of our region.

There have been many highlights in 2023 and a few lowlights, and I am grateful for both. For everyone that has been a part of this journey – THANK YOU! Transformative work is hard work and it is heart work.

I am asking every member to continue to join us in this transformative work by:

- Praying for the church, the vision, and our community during your daily devotional time
- Taking seriously your growth as a Christian with regular church and Bible Study attendance, and full participation in the life of the church
- Participating in a “Thrive Group”
- Serving in a ministry
- Supporting the church vision generously with your finances
- Committing to your physical, mental, and emotional health
- Becoming more financially secure by spending wisely and saving aggressively
- Committing to a dedicated family time each week
- Speaking well of the church in general and your church in particular
- Inviting someone to church each month
- Sharing your faith. Committing to leading one person to Christ this year
- Participating in our local and national elections
- Following the church and your Pastor on your social media platforms
- Reviewing the church on Google and other search engines
- Using the MinistryOne app

We Are Thriving,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James D. Gailliard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'J' and 'G'.

James David Gailliard, Senior Pastor