

Columbia City First Church— Success that goes beyond the numbers

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I sure some of you have seen this through social media in the past few weeks while others may have taken note of the news in Outreach Magazine (<http://www.outreachmagazine.com>). The Columbia City First Church of God in Columbia City, IN (Midwest Region Conference) was recently named as one of the 100 fastest growing churches in the United States for 2016 (<http://omag-eszuskq0bptlfh8awbb.stackpathdns.com/outreach-100-fastest-growing-churches-2016.html?pag=10>). To my knowledge, it's the first time a church from the CGGC has made the list! Congratulations to our brothers and sisters at Columbia City First Church (<http://www.firstchurchconnect.com/homepage>). If you want to get more of a local take on their story, you can check out this story from their local paper (<https://inwhitleycounty.com/2017/03/02/first-church-one-fastest-growing-nation/>).



Pastor Johnny McCallister—Photo from inwhitleycounty.com, Nicole Minier

I had the privilege of worshipping with our brothers and sisters at Columbia City First Church a few weeks ago. Pastor Jim Martin and his wife Carolyn had invited the Finley family to join them for worship and lunch. Pastor Jim previously served as the director of renewal with the CGGC in the late 90's and then “retired”, moved to Columbia City, and served at First Church for 17 years as an associate pastor. Jim retired again last year after 60 years of ministry but he continues to serve the congregation as an elder.

While it's nice to see a congregation recognized for their numerical growth, their “success” goes far beyond their worship attendance. Here are three things that really stood out to me from my time at Columbia City First Church.



Fall Fest 2016

They are an outward focused body. They are reaching into their community and serving beyond the four walls of the church building. It's not just about Sunday morning. During the worship service, there was a time dedicated to sharing an update and prayer focus from one of their local ministry partners: The Center for Whitley County Youth (<http://www.thecentercc.com/>). The church is involved in that work in a number of ways. If you take a look at the church website, you'll learn that this is just one of the ways they are serving the local community in Jesus' name.

They are serious about reaching the next generation for Christ. First Church celebrated several baptisms the Sunday I visited: all children and youth. As I scanned the congregation during worship, I couldn't help but notice that the front rows on the left side of the sanctuary were filled with high school and middle school students who were fully engaged in worship. They've dedicated major space, staff and resources to reach and disciple the next generation for Christ's kingdom.



They are offering ministry to those often overlooked by churches: families with special needs children. Perhaps this is the one that stood out to me the most. The church has recently remodel significant space (and has hopes to add more) to accommodate and serve children with special needs. Families with special needs children are often overlooked or left out: parents are often exhausted from the demands of caring for a special need child and are frequently

isolated because few churches are prepared to address the unique needs of special needs children. Pastor Johnny McCallister shared that this ministry can require up to three adult helpers for every child present. They have found a "niche" that few are able or willing to serve and they're doing it with excellence.

I'm grateful for the good work being done through the ministry of the Columbia City First Church of God. They're reaching out, they're investing in the next generation and they're taking bold steps to reach those who are often overlooked in our society. May their tribe increase!

Christ's Peace,

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