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RS 301 Oral History: Interview with Jerry Cartwright of LifeChurch

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Cole Falco

RS 301

April 29, 2021

I had the pleasure of interviewing a local pastor here named Jerry Cartwright. He is the pastor of LifeChurch and they are a quite prevalent church as they have 4 locations all around Humboldt county. His background before becoming a pastor was that he was a school teacher for an elementary school in Eureka. He said that before Covid hit they would hold a large congregation at multiple times on Sunday which would consist of worship being played by a band and a message from Jerry himself and then after serve some sort of meal after the service in their cafeteria. He even stated they would hold a worship service here in Arcata once a month to try and attract even more people in the church. During these worship services, Lifechurch would hold a kids ministry as well to try and teach the younger children about the word of the Lord in a way that was more effective for them. After these worship sessions were over, Lifechurch had a prayer team that would stay after the service and talk to people one on one and pray over them for whatever they needed big or small. They would then hold Bible study sessions on Wednesday nights. On their Mckinleyville campus they are fortunate enough to have a gymnasium that would hold youth basketball games and a recreational field that hold practices for some of the local soccer teams. LifeChurch is also fortunate enough to have a discipleship school attached to them as well. This school goes from August to May and teaches students ranging from 18 to 40+ to know who they are so they can spread the word of God more effectively. Students come from all over the country to attend this school and Jerry states that hopefully this year they can enroll students from all over the world.

This all came to an abrupt halt when covid hit. Jerry stated that on March 18, the church leaders had an emergency meeting to try and cope with the hardships that were about to come. They then made a plan on how to cope with the incoming regulations and restrictions that were to come due the Covid 19 pandemic. They wanted to find the group of people that would be most affected by the lockdown and reach out to make sure they do not go unnoticed. This happened to be the senior population in the Mckinleyville area. They created a service that would allow these senior citizens to call them up to take them to important appointments or to get groceries for them to minimize their exposure. From time to time, Jerry said that they would prepare meals for the elderly and hand deliver the food to them. They then had to move their worship services to online which was quite a hit for their congregation. Unfortunately due to the pandemic, they had to send all the people attending their discipleship school home and had to transition their classes to online as well. This was also the case with their Wednesday night bible study sessions but since the restrictions have been loosened they have been allowed to do those in person again. They are also now allowed to hold a worship service in person again but with a limited capacity. Jerry states they take multiple precautions like, taking a temperature, staying at least 6 feet away from each other, keeping their masks on at all times, and keeping the doors open to keep air flowing through the building. As stated above their discipleship school had to go online but Jerry is hopeful that will change coming this August. They are hoping that if they divide it up into 2 sections this will allow them to enroll more students as well as attract international students.

He stated their biggest challenge during covid was reaching out to more members of the community. Lifechurch found it quite difficult to reach people on a personal level when they

could only do it over the internet. Jerry said that before they would have multiple events at the McKinleyville campus to entice members of the community to come check out LifeChurch and see what they are all about. Another way LifeChurch would reach out to people was by establishing a prayer hotline for anyone in the county who needed to be prayed over. This is run by their prayer team that would have stayed after the worship service. This hotline is completely free and open 24/7 for anyone who has a prayer request.

They are hoping that once Covid is over they can go back to having a normal worship service without masks and people can socialize afterwards without having to worry about social distancing. He did state that LifeChurch hopes to keep some of the things they implemented during the Covid times even after all the restrictions are gone. Jerry said they would like to keep their online presence by still streaming the worship service for those who could not make for that week. He also stated that if the prayer team is up for it, they would love to keep the prayer hotline up as it has been such a hit over the lockdown. Finally, he still hopes to keep the strong connection with the elderly people and help them out whenever they need it.

Overall, I really enjoyed the experience of interviewing Jerry and even after the interview we stayed and chatted for an hour. Jerry is a very sweet and kind man who genuinely cares about anyone he meets. It is interesting to hear how selfless the leaders of the church were as right in the beginning of the pandemic they met and talked about how they could help their congregation rather than themselves.