

Community Church of Issaquah

January 25, 2026

Going or Being

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In just a short time, we are going to be engaged in focusing on the life and work of our church. Our annual congregational meetings that occur once a year direct us to focus on what we have done in the past year and what we hope to do in the year ahead. It is a strong reminder of how well we are doing the work of the Lord and what part each of us has in that ministry. At the bottom of your bulletin each week there is a line that says, "Every member is a minister." That one thought forms the basis for the mission and work of every church and each of its members, meaning you and me.

Today is also a day of interest on another front. Our home football team has a very important game to play in an effort to return to the Super Bowl. The role of each player on that team is parallel to the roles each of us plays in our own "team." Paul, the Apostle, told those in the beginning churches to accept and use the gift that the Lord had given each of them. Whether that was preaching, teaching, or any other task that made the church function and grow. When I think about the team of our Seahawks, I find it easy to compare that team concept to our church.

Each player has a job making the team successful. From the center who hikes the ball, to the quarterback, to the

wide receiver who tries to find space to run or catch a pass, to the defense players as well. Those tasks are on the playing field. But if you look in the seats surrounding the field, there are spectators and fans in abundance. That is the reality of the work of any church as well. Many choose to be active on the team and others are observers. In minister terms, that means 'watchers' and 'workers.' I would find it difficult to believe that every person who attends services at Crossroads Bible Church over on I-90 is a working member of that team. What kind of jobs are there for the 3000 attenders? So many members and attenders there go for the sole purpose of being ministered to rather than doing the ministry jobs. That is common even for smaller churches.

Churches everywhere are having to face a reality in our society today, and that is the decline of church attendance. I learned recently that even the famous television evangelist, Joel Osteen has seen attendance at his church (which meets in a coliseum) drop in numbers by the thousands. For a multitude of reasons, followers of almost every faith tradition are witnessing the same reality. Would it surprise you to learn that in the year 2025, almost 15,000 churches or worship centers closed in the US? This is the new world in which we are living. People have chosen not to be attenders or workers, but to find spiritual nurturing in other places. I have a dear friend who was a member of the church I pastored when I came to Seattle 40 years ago. When that church folded, she chose another faith community which eventually closed as well. So today she doesn't attend any church. She jokingly says she worships at the Church of St. Mattress or St. Sofa.

Though being a part of an in-person worship experience is truly a gift that comes with a challenge. As you and I sit here today, we are here because we have chosen to be a part of a vital faith family. We come to be spiritually nurtured, to experience the beauty of fellowship, and to invest our lives in the work of the Lord here. We choose to accept the calling of Christ to make disciples but also to be made better disciples ourselves. There is a current phrase that I see repeatedly in the media that simply says, “Don’t just GO to church; BE the church.” That is wise advice that I think even Paul would like to include in his next epistle.

During the months ahead, our hope is that CCI will engage in expanding ministries both in our community and in our own church family. A large part of that effort will be our Mustard Seed Ministry is which the goals we have set and the plans we will make will hopefully grow our church both internally and externally. Our hope is that each of us might experience a deeper faith and that we might transfer that gift to others who need and seek a place to belong and worship. Is that the job of only the Board of Directors or the pastor? No. It is the work of the Lord that each of us can be team members of.

My question for you this morning is this: If you are to BE the church, what will your role be in that urgent and vital ministry? God has given each of us a gift of talent and capabilities, and each of us has been called to use those as we follow the directions of Christ. It is not just to make disciples of all nations, but just as urgent is to love God

and love our neighbors. Let me close and move us closer to our meeting with this revelation. A Disciples of Christ Church in Yakima recently posted a new sign in front of their church. It reads: “God’s welcome is WIDE and so is ours.” To define the meaning of that phrase, the church says:

- Every age group is appreciated and welcomed.
- Your questions, your doubts, and your skepticism are welcome in this space.
- We respect all races, cultures, and ethnicities here, and all are welcome.
- Married or single, you are welcome.
- Straight or gay, you are welcome.
- People of all economic situations are welcome.
- God’s love is global.

I wish I had thought of that. It truly speaks to our world today. Now may we share in the work of our church as we pray as a family of faith.