

Chapter 7. 2000 -

Our Current Pastor: Dr. John Leffler



Dr. John Leffler

Pastor Dr. John Leffler was born July 10, 1959 and grew up in Puyallup, Washington. He graduated from John R. Rogers High School in that community in 1978. His wife Ruth (Leber) was in the same class in high school. John graduated from Northwest Christian College, Eugene, Oregon with a Bachelor of Arts in June 1982. His major educational emphasis was in Bible with a double minor in Pastoral/Educational ministries. Ruth received her nursing degree that same year, and they married on June 11, 1982 within a week of their mutual graduations. They have one daughter, Amanda, born September 13, 1986.

BEFORE CASTLE ROCK CHRISTIAN CHURCH

John's first ministry was at the Chuckey Presbyterian Church in Chuckey, Tennessee where he was Student Minister from March 1984 to September 1986. This is while he was a student at Emmanuel School of Religion in Johnson City, Tennessee. While ministering in Chuckey, he also was interim pastor for the Philadelphia Presbyterian Church in Limestone, Tennessee from August of 1985 to November 1986 thus serving two churches at once.

John graduated from Emmanuel School of Religion in June 1986 earning a Masters of Divinity.

He returned to Washington State to be ordained by the elders in his home church on June 8, 1986. He started his ministry in Washington when he accepted the pastorate of the Grandview Christian Church starting October 1, 1988. During this time John was also involved with the Salvation Army, assisting in the administration of a drug and alcohol abuse prevention program.

John resigned his position with the Grandview Church on November 30, 1989 to take a pastorate with the Burns Christian Church in Burns, Oregon starting in December of 1989. This was John's longest ministry to date of more than 11 years. During this time he also earned his Doctorate of Ministry (D. Min.) from Northwest Graduate School of the Ministry which he completed in February 1997. John has had three articles published in the *Christian Standard*.

They are:

“Let's Take Another Look at Marriage” Christian Standard, November 1, 1998 ***“Making A Difference--One Family at a Time”*** Christian Standard, March 7, 1999 ***“What Are You Going to Miss This Christmas?”*** Christian Standard, December 23, 2001

OUR FIRST SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

During the first year of Pastor John's ministry our Bible college scholarship program was established. Actually two funds were established. One is called the Endowment Fund, which is managed to create income through investments. The scholarship committee may elect to move up to 5% of the interest earnings from the Endowment Fund to the Scholarship Fund along with monies that have been collected by different fund raising activities throughout each calendar year.

The Scholarship Fund was set up to be a short-term fund that would collect money from many different sources during the year through various fund raising activities to create the actual scholarships. The Scholarship Committee would use all of these various funds to make distributions of scholarships to qualified students who met the requirements set out in the scholarship committee bylaws.

The scholarship committee administers both funds. It is a branch of the missions committee and operates under the authority of the elders. As of December 31, 2003 the Endowment Fund has grown to \$28,717.88 and \$5,350.00 has been granted to our members in the way of scholarships. The members of the education committee are Elder Les Greene, Deacon Scott Spencer, Kathy Oman, Pat Pohle, and Lenard Hovde.

JUNE 8, 2003 – RECONCILIATION SUNDAY

It has been said that history has a tendency to “repeat itself.” But sometimes history must be broken and restarted. Churches of all shapes and sizes, including Castle Rock Christian Church, have been riddled with misunderstandings – even to the point of splitting.

As reported earlier in this manuscript, we experienced such an upset at the turn of this century. As the result of several discussions and people taking sides, Pastor Ed Miller resigned. Several of those who disagreed with the leadership of this congregation started the Wellspring Fellowship.



Judy Miller and JoAnn Cole on Reconciliation Sunday

June 8, 2003 was Reconciliation Sunday. It had been three years (to the Sunday) that Wellspring Fellowship had been formed. Very little communication had taken place between the church and the fellowship until Reconciliation Sunday.

IN 2003 LIFE CHANGED

The following is a portion of a message that Pastor John Leffler delivered to the congregation of Castle Rock Christian Church on June 8, 2003.

“Those of you, who know me well, know that I am not one to say the words ‘God told me so’ on too many occasions. I generally find it very frustrating to have people quote God’s words (when they are not quoting Scripture). I believe that God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. It was God who worked ‘quality control’ on Old Testament prophets by having them stoned to death if their prophecy was untrue. With that kind of mindset, I am always reluctant to use the words ‘God told me so.’

“When I arrived in Castle Rock in August 2000, I quickly began my habit of walking the high school track early in the morning. Not only is this for exercise but more importantly it is a quiet time with God. (If you did not know it – the high school track is a Holy place. God is there.) My constant prayer since that August has been for vision and direction from God for the purpose and mission of Castle Rock Christian Church. This has been my prayer for the last 33 months ... but nothing was becoming clear.

“I was given an invitation to attend and participate with the pastors of Kelso/Longview in their annual Pastors Prayer Summit held at the Cannon Beach Conference Center last year. To their surprise, I accepted. It was a surprise to them because no one there knew why I had been given the repeated invitations through the mail, but they accepted me graciously, and we had a wonderful time in the Lord.

“I went back again this year. During one of the free afternoons, while in my room, I had the strong impression that God was speaking to me, not in audible terms that one can hear with the ear, but in my mind. The message He gave to me was this:

“Go and be reconciled with Wellspring Fellowship.”

“I remember saying in my mind... How are we to do that? And again the direct impression was this...

I want you to invite Wellspring Fellowship to have a Reconciliation Service with you on Pentecost Sunday (which is the birthday of the Church). I want you to prepare your people with a series of sermons on Repentance from the Psalms. The purpose is to be a witness to the community and if you do I will bless you and if you don't, I will withhold my blessing.

“After this ‘encounter’ with God, I began to pray, to ponder, and to plan. I shared with the other pastors there a little of what I had experienced and they were all very excited for us, but I was somewhat reluctant. Not because I did not believe it should be done, but because I know that division in the Church is one of the enemy’s strongest hold on the Kingdom.

“I then presented the ideas to our elders of which I received a clear message to continue. I then contacted Pastor Ed Miller of Wellspring Fellowship, and we met so that I could share with him what I believed God was saying.

“Without any reluctance or reserve, Pastor Ed agreed that we needed to have a meeting with Castle Rock elders and Dale McClellan (Board Chair) and himself to work out some details.



Friends gathered together on Reconciliation Sunday

“We then met for two separate meetings, both of which had God’s hand obviously moving among us resulting in an offer from our elders to meet with Wellspring and sharing the plan of reconciliation. The atmosphere of that meeting together was sweet. After some introductory words, I shared what I have just shared with you in this article. Their response was ... ‘We want God’s blessing and it is what God’s word says we are supposed to do. Let’s do it! In fact, we need to invite everyone who has left both Wellspring and Castle Rock Christian Church to come and be reconciled together on that Sunday.’

“I must make some points of explanation and definition very clear.

RECONCILIATION is not Re-Unification. This is NOT a process to merge Castle Rock Christian Church and Wellspring Fellowship together. WE DO want to acknowledge Wellspring as a SISTER CHURCH of whom we might work alongside of each other in ministry. Having unity in ministry still allows for uniqueness and autonomy. Unity does not mean unification.



Gathered together on Reconciliation Sunday

“A precedent has already been made in Scripture for what is happening...

II Corinthians 5:17-20 (NIV): “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: be reconciled to God.’

“In closing this message to you, let me remind you of how important this is. In the past, some from outside the body of Christ at Castle Rock Christian Church have seen us as a church of conflict, a fighting church. And true, there have been struggles, splits, dissention, and strife in the 150 years God has maintained us, but that is not the witness we want to share with the world around us. In the early church, the pagans were amazed at the Believers and could always tell who they were ‘because they loved one another.’ May we be known from this day forth as Brothers and Sisters who love one another! Sunday, June 8, 2003 (Pentecost Sunday) will be known as **Reconciliation Sunday** – A day of God’s Blessing!”

And oh what a blessing it was! Pastor Ed and the Wellspring Fellowship did come, and Pastor John opened our service inviting everyone to participate while Pastor Ed brought greetings from Wellspring and encouraged everyone to do what is right the Biblical way and to simply be obedient.

Pastor John shared a message of unity among Christians through a variety of stories and a video, and then led the congregation through an interactive prayer of repentance and decision as well as a call to our remembrance those whom we have offended and who have offended us. We were then to go and meet with each of those people whom God had placed on our hearts.

It was at this point that God's hand took over in the meeting. He raised people to their feet and they began to move all over the sanctuary. People were sobbing, hugging, forgiving, and mending old wounds. It was moment one could wish might last forever even though it was painful to go and meet, in some cases, people who were adversaries the last time they were in the room.

As the worship service closed, everyone was encouraged to go to the one with whom they had reconciled, or families together go and share in communion with one another. Communion sets had been placed around the room in different locations so there would be easy access to where people were sitting.

Following the service we shared together a time of refreshments out in the grass courtyard. People probably stayed another couple of hours, just to share in the moment and experience the freedom of forgiveness.

Reconciliation Sunday was a day that God was truly with us – moving – and active in our presence!

Pastor John Leffler