

# River Ridge Covenant Church



*Love, Grow, Serve: Celebrating Our Legacy – Our Future*

## River Ridge Covenant Church History

### ***The Beginnings***

River Ridge Covenant Church (RRCC) originated among the members of Grace Community Covenant Church (GCCC), when discussions began about planting a church in the Hawks Prairie area of Lacey, Washington. In June 1993, that idea began to take shape as office space was leased on Martin Way. With Pastor Mark Orr at the helm as Lead Pastor, the fellowship group began to gather regularly.

### ***The first years***

RRCC's first service was held Saturday, November 7th, 1993. Services were held on Saturday nights, because River Ridge was renting space from North Thurston Life Center. RRCC began meeting on Sunday mornings at River Ridge High School in January 1994. All the necessary equipment was stored in a trailer, hauled to the school, and set up each Sunday morning. The grand opening worship service was held later that month on January 30th. On March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1994, Pastor Mark Orr, Lay Pastor Mark Meredith, North Pacific Conference Superintendent Glenn Palmberg and 118 members all signed the River Ridge Charter.

### ***Our own facilities***

In the summer of 1995, National Covenant Properties purchased the property in unincorporated Thurston County on Steilacoom Road, across the street from Nisqually Middle School and near Ostrom's Mushroom Farm. In August that same year, the building planning process began and the church office moved into the house on the property that September. In January 1997, River Ridge held its first service in the new building, which included a combination sanctuary and gymnasium – sometimes affectionately called a sanctuasium. In 1998, utilizing expertise from the congregation, River Ridge began to plan and build the youth education building called *The Lighthouse*, which was almost completely built by

members and friends of the church. It was completed in phases, with class usage in 1999 and final completion in 2000.

### ***New Staff and New Buildings***

In 1998, the congregation voted to hire an associate pastor. In January 1999, Pastor Jon Parreno was added to staff as the Pastor of Congregational Life. Later that year Children's Christian Education classes began in the Lighthouse. That same year, Pastor Jon, with help from many at the church, began both the Living Last Supper and Living Nativity productions. These events were well attended, appreciated and challenging at times (how do you keep the sheep from escaping?)!

In 2000, RRCC formed the Future Directions Task Force to explore potential building and ministry expansions. The Building Committee was formed that fall and began to work on a plan for River Ridge's building expansion. Groundbreaking was held in November of 2001 and occupation began in September of 2002. Soon after the addition of the new Christian Education wing of the building, the Lighthouse was converted into the Senior High Youth. A few months later, the Senior High Youth Group began to meet in their new space and the Junior High took over their old space in the building behind the rental house.

After recognizing that the Council (also known as the Board of Administration) did not necessarily have the gifts to help care for the staff and congregation, the Board of Spiritual Life was added in May of 2002. With the approval of a new constitution and by-laws in 2016, the Board of Spiritual Life became the Shepherding Team.

In late 2002, the congregation voted to plant a church in Yelm, and thus Crossroads Covenant Church was born. In addition to the River Ridge members that chose to transfer to Crossroads, a few other River Ridge members agreed to temporarily assist in getting Crossroads off the ground and running. On Easter morning 2003, Crossroads held their first service at a school in Yelm. On Easter morning, 2011, Crossroads held their first service in their new building.

In June 2004, Pastor Ben Kerns was called to River Ridge to serve as Youth Pastor, and in August 2005 River Ridge hired Brad Hostak as Youth Ministry Assistant.

### ***Difficult Times***

In early 2005, two of the ministry staff resigned, Associate Pastor Jon Parreno and Youth Pastor Ben Kerns. To the surprise of many, the founding pastor Mark Orr subsequently resigned in the fall of 2005.

### ***A Brighter Tomorrow***

In October 2005, a Pastoral Search Committee was formed and charged with the responsibility of searching for a new lead pastor. Retired Covenant Pastor Gary Peterson was asked to serve as the interim pastor, and the healing process began for River Ridge. Brad Hostak was officially called to be the Youth Director, and after receiving his ministerial license in 2009, became the Youth Pastor.

In June 2006, Pastor Brian Wiele was called to RRCC to serve as Lead Pastor. Brian and Linda moved to Olympia from California, and began their ministry among us in August 2006.

In line with the theme of serving, the first Faith in Action Sunday in May 2007 took the church outside the building and into the community. On this Sunday, more than a 100 participants went out into the community and performed a variety of tasks ranging from painting a Bike Trail wall along Interstate 5 to delivering cookies to nursing homes and fire stations. This has become an annual ministry for RRCC which continues to this day. In 2008 the Simple Church Committee recommended the adoption of “*Love, Grow, Serve (repeat)*” as RRCC’s mission statement.

### ***Ministry Staff Changes***

In 2007 and again in 2009, River Ridge voted to hire students from the denomination’s seminary to serve as pastoral interns – Kirsten Kronberg (2007-2008) and Jeff and Carrie McClain (2009-2010). Each served in many areas of ministry, and their presence among us was a blessing to us as they increased their knowledge and skills.

After numerous years of serving as our volunteer Children’s Ministry Coordinator, Peggy Melhaff was brought on paid ministry staff in January 2013 to serve as our Children’s Pastor. She subsequently received her bi-vocational ministry license with the Covenant. Although she technically works “part-time”, everyone knows

that she serves the entire church in numerous ways, including participating regularly in leadership planning, worship, congregational events, and women's ministries.

In the fall of 2011 Brad Hostak resigned to pursue a career as a school counselor. After conducting a nationwide search, a call was extended to Dan Meyerpeter in May 2012 to serve as our Pastor to Youth and Families. Dan came to us with significant experience in youth ministry and in matching congregations to community service projects. After completing the Covenant Orientation requirements, Dan was Ordained to Word and Service in the Evangelical Covenant Church in June 2016.

In 2011, as part of the Bridge to the Future Campaign. Richard (Dick) Gordon joined the RRCC pastoral staff. Initially he served as a volunteer, but subsequently was called to serve as Associate Pastor. In December of 2014 RRCC found that due to financial limitations it could no longer support the position of Associate Pastor.

### ***Recent Ministry Highlights***

A regional focus to our desire to serve began in 2011 with the forging of a partnership with Makah Lutheran Church in Neah Bay, Washington on the Makah Reservation. After a couple of years where some River Ridge congregants engaged in service projects at their church, we have been excited to see a blossoming of our desire to have more of a reciprocal relationship. We continue to send teams regularly to their church, and they have traveled south to be with us for several weekends, including participating in our 2017 Faith In Action Sunday.

In 2011 Pastor Brian Wiele was the guest speaker at the African Covenant Missionaries Conference in Cameroon. While there he also visited Bokonzo, the location of the headquarters for the Covenant Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo. There he learned of the community's desperate need for a new water storage tower. Their existing tower was cracked and badly leaking, often leaving the community without a clean source of water. Upon returning Brian informed the RRCC congregation of the need and a campaign was started to raise the needed funds. By year's end the funds had been raised, and an RRCC member – who was also a recently retired civil engineer – traveled to Bokonzo to help with

the construction of the new tower. Using his engineering skills he also helped to rehabilitate the old tower.

For the last several years we have had other congregations rent space from RRCC for their ministries. Peace Church, a Korean fellowship, has used what was formerly called our “Junior High Building” for almost four years. Casa de Alabanza has been meeting at RRCC since 2015, and we have had some wonderful times of joint worship services and picnics. Additionally, the Samoan Fellowship of Praise rented our youth ministry building for approximately two years before their ministry closed.

At the writing of this document, we are a smaller congregation than we formerly were. However, to quote Gary Walter ECC President, we are fighting well above our weight class. We have truly become a serving church. We are known and appreciated for our significant partnerships with many organizations and ministries in our region. These include Family Support Center, North Thurston Public Schools (Nisqually Middle School & Meadows Elementary), Kokua Services, Alcoholics Anonymous, Lacey Parks and Recreation, Truly Motivated Transitional Living, CareNet, South Sound Parent to Parent, Joyful Hands Ministries, and Cub Scout pack 207.