



Encounter is a new faith community of Christ-followers in Helena.
Freeing people to encounter Jesus Christ to pursue a growing relationship with Him

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WHY ANOTHER CHURCH IN HELENA?

Helena lies in the heart of Montana's Lewis & Clark county, about 264 miles from Spokane, Washington and 289 miles from Boise, Idaho. Disputably the fourth largest city in Montana, Helena is second only to Bozeman in economic vitality among Montana cities. Helena has enjoyed consistent growth (*17 percent*) for more than 15 years.

While projections in 2000 suggested the entire Lewis & Clark County to boast a population of nearly 70,000 by 2020, new figures prove such projections are conservative. Estimates from the Helena Chamber of Commerce show the greater Helena metro area alone, to be already nearing the 70,000 mark according to recent 2006 figures.

Clearly, Helena is experiencing a population growth like never before. The migration of peoples from around the Western United States has made Helena one of Montana's fastest growing cities. Despite it's growth, Helena is still considered a small town by some, but affords many of the amenities of a more urban population – having been listed as number 5 on BizJounal's list of "American Dreamtowns."

The heartbeat of the Helena is made up of a unique mix of government and a young college culture with over 26 percent of the population between the ages of 25 and 44 (*according to Census 2000*).



The majority of its workforce is federal workers, business professionals, white-collar workers, and employees of small businesses numbering the percentage of persons with college degrees somewhere between 31 to 39 percent.

Helena appears saturated with churches – in fact, it seems as though there is a church on every corner. However, the reality is that while 50 percent of people in Helena claim to have a church affiliation, only 10 percent are members of an evangelical church. At best, there is at least another 50 percent that do not – they don't even attend church.

More importantly, we can see there is a massive shortfall of people who are in a growing relationship with Jesus, regardless of the number of churches in Helena. Helena churches are not reaching everyone – especially the younger generation and those who are far from God. Our observation is that a large potential of souls are being sacrificed because many churches are desperately trying to keep and satisfy a handful of traditional church-goers.

The idea behind Encounter rests upon the need to create environments where believers can be excited about bringing their un-churched friends; environments where the un-churched will experience something so different, unique, and life-giving that they want to come back, whether they believe the teaching or not. These will be environments where people can experience God through "touchstones" in their life experience and culture; environments where things are done with excellence and where adults, teens, and kids encounter a creative God as a result of what we do through Christ.



WHOM DO WE INTEND TO REACH?

This Generation

Our focus is on this generation, but the results (*from communities like North Point Community Church in Atlanta, LifeChurch.tv in Oklahoma City, Journey Church in Bozeman, and SHEC in Missoula*) have demonstrated that people of all ages are reached through this model.

That is why we will design our services and events with the 18-35 year old in mind (*ages 25 to 44 make up nearly 26 percent of Helena according to Census 2000*). However, our programming will appeal to a wider audience from teenagers to Boomers. That's because environments designed for a younger audience are more likely to reach a younger generation AND also reach older adults. But the reverse is not true. When we design our services for an older audience, the younger crowd will not show up.

People Far From God

Jesus came to seek and save what was lost (*Luke 19:10*). He commanded His followers to go into all the world and “make disciples” of those who were not followers (*Matthew 28:19*). One day Jesus pushed the concept to a radical extreme when He told the story about a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. He suggested that it was appropriate to leave the ninety-nine that were safe in order to find the one that was lost. What do you think Jesus would say about leaving the almost 50 percent who presently attend church in Helena to reach the 50 percent who do not?

We believe that, like Jesus, we must develop a heart for those who are far away from God, including those who are un-churched and those that have found traditional church lacking or irrelevant. All that we do in our programming, communications, and ministry will be considered through the lens of the un-churched in this generation.



Followers of Christ

As we seek to reach the above-mentioned groups, we believe that we identify with the purpose and meaning of what Jesus intended His Church to be. In this, we give current followers of Jesus a community in which to live out and become Christ in this world. Through the environments we create and the lives we live, believers will be drawn to their purpose at Encounter to free people to encounter Jesus and lead them into a growing relationship with Him.

WHAT IS OUR VISION AND STRATEGY?

Our vision is derived from Moses' encounter with God through the burning bush in Exodus 3. Those far from God are living their lives apart from His will and purpose.

In the Exodus account, Moses was tending his sheep when the Lord *"appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, 'I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.'"*

Much like Moses, we are presented with potential "encounters" with God that will lead to a transformed life through a growing relationship with Jesus. But we are often too burdened and distracted to recognize and respond. Part of what Encounter Church is about is freeing people from those burdens and distractions and allowing them to take that next step.



No matter where someone is spiritually - skeptic, new believer, returning to the faith, growing believer — we want them to be moving forward in their faith relationship with Jesus Christ. That's because we see discipleship not as a goal to achieve, but as a process of becoming more and more intimate with Jesus Christ.

We want to catch people's attention so that they can hear God. We want to be that burning bush. It is from this image that the vision, mission, and strategy of Encounter Church emerged.

Our Vision ... to free people to encounter Jesus Christ

Our Mission ... to lead people in a growing relationship with Jesus

Our Strategy ... to create environments where people are encouraged & equipped to:

- Encounter God — Growing faith through intimacy with Jesus
- Experience Community — Developing authentic relationships by doing life together
- Engage Culture — Transforming people by investing in trust relationships

THREE ESSENTIAL ENVIRONMENTS

At Encounter, our approach is to keep things simple. We want to focus on doing a few things well, rather than doing many things poorly. That is why we will not focus on programs, but on always taking that next step. And there will be just three essential environments to encourage and equip people to move forward in their relationship with God.

1. Worship Gatherings (Encounter God)

The worship gathering must be an environment where believers can be excited about bringing their un-churched friends. It will be edgy and engaging. The look and feel of the music, video, sound, lights, and hospitality – all must be done in such a way that it honors God and is appealing and enjoyable. This will be an environment where people can experience God through “touchstones” in their life experience and culture – an environment where people will encounter a creative God as a result of everything we do.



2. Small Groups (Experience Community)

To us, small groups means “relationship” and relationship means growth. No growth happens apart from relationship with Jesus and others. If we are to “lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ,” we believe that the best place for people to experience that continuing life change (*spiritual growth, discipleship, and close community with other believers*) is in a small group context at every level – the kids, students, adults, etc. For this reason, Encounter will not establish a traditional “Sunday School” program.

3. Outward Focus (Engage Culture)

Finally, we understand that all of us must be committed to investing in relationships with people who are far from God, both as individuals and as a faith community. We will create opportunities to serve and to love our community expecting nothing in return. Community events and service projects will provide an opportunity for those at Encounter to not only meet needs and create awareness, but also to change lives and transform the culture of our city.

OTHER KEY COMPONENTS

There are some other key components we identify as distinctive features of the Encounter ministry model and strategy.

1. Believer baptism & communion

Encounter sees baptism as a very important step of a believer's faith and obedience where we place emphasis on a public declaration that we are aligning ourselves with Christ. We do not, however, believe baptism is required for salvation. While we believe that baptism by complete immersion is the Biblical example, we will be more focused on "when" and "why" than the "how." Encounter will observe both believer baptism and communion as ordinances in which both individuals and the church community will participate.

2. Non-denominational approach

The un-churched are more open to attending a church that appears to not have much of the "baggage" and institutionalism associated with many denominations. While Encounter is partnering with the Montana SBC in alignment with their theology and cooperative missions program – we are an autonomous faith-community and will focus on the heart of Jesus in our teaching and practice.

As Paul expressed it, we will be about "*preaching Christ and Christ crucified*" (1 Corinthians 2:2) rather than building denominational walls. It is for this very same reason that we do not use a denominational description in our name.

3. Relevant, Biblical, and focused teaching

As we grow, the weekly gathering teaching responsibilities will be shared among selected Encounter staff (see Dave Ferguson's *The Big Idea* for an idea of how this might be implemented). We value a unified approach to our worship gathering communication where the entire "message" is intentionally shared and focused in a tag-team contribution of elements such as teaching, music, drama, arts, etc. In addition, we believe this teaching approach will allow Encounter staff to focus their gifting in various areas to better achieve the vision and mission of the church.

4. Growing faith & relationship, not just knowledge

Spiritual growth is not primarily about becoming smarter or even more obedient. Spiritual growth is about a relationship with our heavenly Father through Jesus Christ. Consequently, spiritual growth is about faith-growth. As our faith grows, our relationship deepens.

Bible knowledge alone will make us proud. Obedience alone will make us judgmental. But trust makes us dependent. While we desire for people to learn and obey, our most important goal is to help people grow in their faith through an unwavering trust in Jesus. In that, our Father is honored and lives will be richer.

5. Being intentionally strategic

There must be strategic times when we ask the hard questions and evaluate our progress. We must become students of who we're trying to reach. We need to figure out how to reach them, how to connect them, how to build a bridge to them, and how to turn on a light for them. We must have a mindset that nothing is sacred — that we're not going to be a traditionalist church.

There's nothing wrong with traditions but that's different from traditionalism. Traditionalism is when you become a worshipper of your traditions — that's where there's a problem. That's why Encounter will intentionally plan to be strategic in all our decisions and ministry.

A GLIMPSE OF LAUNCH DAY

Craig Groeschel says, “In order to reach people that no one is reaching, you have to do something that no one is doing.” Encounter’s goal in style and strategy is to “do church differently” in order to fill the gap that exists in Helena. And that is exactly what we see when we look forward to our public launch:

Encounter Worship

We want to create an environment where this generation feels comfortable and the distractions are removed. An environment that is edgy and engaging, yet firmly grounded in Jesus and the scriptures. We will communicate the truth of God and the life-giving message of Jesus in a way that we can understand and apply to our real life.

The lights will be dim. There may be candles. There will be a variety of people from different backgrounds, some with tattoos and piercings. It’s a place where this generation feels comfortable because it’s the kind of environment where we like to hang out. Think about the coffee shops, the sandwich places, the movie theaters.

There will be screens where the message is reinforced by media, commercials, movies, and TV clips - things in our culture that we can identify with, in a medium that this generation understands. We say all the time that a picture is worth a thousand words. What we communicate in a visual message can sometimes be much more impactful than explaining it with five or ten minutes of words.

The music will be loud and edgy like something you might hear on the radio or experience at a concert. Instead of asking people to turn off their phones, we’ll be asking them to text their questions and comments during the message.

Encounter Kids

During the adult gathering, children will be meeting together in an age-appropriate celebration of the same. They will gather for live music and engaging lessons that are fun, but also track with the message in the adult gathering. That way parents and children can share and discuss the common message. Our weekly gathering time will be the best opportunity for children to then break into age-based small groups.

Encounter LifeGroups

Our Encounter LifeGroups for teens and adults will be held throughout the week in various locations such as homes, coffee shops, and other meeting places. These provide an opportunity for encouragement, discipleship, growth, and accountability in the context of doing life together.

Encounter Impact

At the same time, we at Encounter understand the importance of creating a dialogue within our community through service. We will love others like Jesus did, with no strings attached and without seeing people as evangelistic targets. We will intentionally gather together and strategically meet needs through Community Service Projects, while at the same time living out that same lifestyle as individuals. We want to invest our lives in others so that they can encounter Jesus through us.

CORE VALUES

Encounter will be a church community focused on removing obstacles and barriers and freeing people to encounter Jesus Christ. That means first and foremost, we will embody the purpose and personality of Jesus and demonstrate them through our lives and actions. In all we do as Encounter Church, we will strive to be:

Creative – We know there is life in the creative actions of our God and want people to experience that life as a result of all we creatively do through Jesus.

Authentic – We will be real and transparent in our life struggles and successes in order to remove barriers in our personal relationships with Jesus and others.

Relational – We believe life transformation happens best in the context of personal relationships.

Relevant – We will speak into people’s lives with the true relevance of Christ in ways that they can experience God through “touchstones” in their life experience and culture.

Intentional – We believe that when we are purposeful and focused in our actions, we stand a much better chance of being able to accomplish significant things.

Excellent – We will do the very best that we can with what God has given us because excellence honors God and inspires people.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

About the Scriptures - We believe the entire Bible is the inspired Word of God and that men were moved by the Spirit of God to write the very words of Scripture. Therefore, we believe the Bible is without error and reveals the very character and heart of God.



About God - We believe in one God who exists in three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe that Jesus Christ is the second member of the Trinity (the Son of God) who became flesh to reveal God to man and to become the Savior of the lost world.

About Mankind – We believe that mankind was created in the image of God to have fellowship with Him but became alienated in that relationship through sinful disobedience. As a result, man is incapable of regaining a right relationship with God through his own effort.

About Salvation – We believe that the blood of Jesus Christ, shed on the cross, provides the sole basis for the forgiveness of sin. Therefore, salvation occurs only when people place their faith in the death and resurrection of Christ as sufficient payment for their sin.

About the Christian Life – We believe that every Christian will live for Christ and not for himself. By obedience to the Word of God and daily yielding to the Spirit of God, every believer will mature and be conformed to the image of Christ.

About the Church – We believe that the church is the body of Christ, of which Jesus Christ is the head. The members of the church are those who have trusted by faith the finished work of Christ. The purpose of the church is to glorify God by loving Him and by making Him known to the lost world.

LAUNCH PLAN IN SEVEN PHASES

There are many ways to launch a new church. Some are satellite campuses of existing churches, some are home gatherings, and some are missions in a foreign place.

Encounter Church, however, will build a strong church planting and launch team, create awareness by impacting our community, and then launch with a large public worship gathering. We want to open our doors with excellence and momentum. We believe if you start strong, you have a greater chance of growing strong – and such an approach is the best one to effectively reach this generation in this place and in this time.

Here are the 7 phases of our church planting strategy that will take us through a public launch:

1. *Conception - April to July 2008*

Vision is granted, Planter is Called, Core Values, Strategic Plan, Structure

2. *Partnership Strategy –*

September 2008 to March 2009

Intercessory Prayer Partners, Organizational Partnerships, Partner Churches, Financial Partners

3. *Building Relationships –*

March to July 2009

One-to-One Connections, Small Groups, Informational Meetings

4. *Launch Team Development –*

June to December 2009

Gather Launch Team, Strategic Meetings, Develop Ministry Teams for Launch (*Worship, Host, Kids, Small Groups, Community Impact*)

5. *Community Service & Awareness – April to December 2009*

Community Service Projects, Increased Community Involvement, General Awareness

6. *Preview Services – January to March 2010*

Monthly Pre-Launch Worship Gatherings - Band, Speaking, and Host Teams Developed

7. *Launch Public Service – April 2010*

One or two weeks before Easter. Lots of public awareness.



CHURCH PLANTING PARTNERSHIPS

Encounter has partnered with the Association of Related Churches (ARC) for coaching and potential financial assistance. Eric and Andrea were recommended and approved for church planting after attending ARC's Church Planting Assessment in December 2008. Encounter is also working with another church planting network, the Montana SBC, with experience and ties specific to Montana.

At this time we are sponsored by two churches — Big Sky Fellowship in Helena, Montana, and Convergence Ministries (e3) in Missoula, Montana. We are also receiving church planting assistance from Cornerstone Community Fellowship in Livingston, Montana. Eric has also been approved as a church planting missionary with the North American Mission Board (NAMB) since April 2009.

With these partners and more, our goal is to plant a high-impact church in Helena, Montana with a vision to build a relevant, missional faith community that helps people encounter Jesus.

Partnerships with Other Established Churches

We are still seeking to partner with established churches, local and beyond, to further the expansion of God's Kingdom. In such a partnership, an established church can continue reaching the population that it is effective at reaching, while joining with Encounter to reach the "un-reached" of Helena.

We will be challenging established churches to partner with us primarily through prayer, people, resources, and finances. More specifically, we are looking to raise the \$90,000 in startup funds we need through the "Thousand Campaign." We want to challenge 100 churches to give at least \$1,000 each. Additionally, members of these partner churches can also help. We just need 1,000 people to give \$100 each.

Will you be a sponsor church? Sponsoring a church plant is a benefit to the sponsor church as well as the church plant. Many sponsor churches experience a positive, re-energizing transformation. People's burden for the lost grows as they pray and see fruit from their supportive efforts. Their faith in God is strengthened as they participate in reaching a previously un-reached population. Some may even be called to a deeper level of commitment in the sponsoring church as they see how people can be reached when God's people respond.

For further information on how to schedule a visit and presentation for your church and how your church can sponsor Encounter, please contact us at info@encounterhelena.org. Specific donation information is listed under the "SHARE financially" section later in this document.

WHAT MINISTRY TEAMS WILL BE NEEDED TO LAUNCH ENCOUNTER?

As the Encounter Launch Team develops, several Ministry Teams must be established and made functional to help bring us to a public launch. While some tasks may overlap and teams must work together, the following is an outline of four basic Ministry Teams:

Worship Gathering Team – The worship team is responsible to ensure our worship services are effective entry environments. They will plan, execute, and evaluate worship gatherings according to “clarity/focus” and “forward movement” within the vision and core values of Encounter. Sub-teams may include Worship arts, Technical audio/visual, Setup/teardown, and Hosting/frontline



Kids/Students Team – The kids/student team will focus on creating an age-appropriate environment for nursery, elementary, and above. These environments will bring the same “clarity/focus” and “forward movement” and occur at the same time as the adult worship gathering. Therefore, those in this team must work hand-in-hand with both the Worship and Small Group teams.



Small Group Team – In small groups, team members’ gifts will be focused in the areas of child, student, and adult small groups. The Small Groups team will develop and equip key ministry leaders to encourage discipleship, growth, accountability, and authentic relationships by doing life together.



Impact Team – To maintain a consistent focus on outward focus, the impact team will direct it’s effort toward research and implementation of community impact events and service project. Such efforts will be a mix of individual and church-wide opportunities to meet needs in the Helena community and beyond. Team members will encourage and equip a lifestyle of investing in others’ lives and impacting this generation and beyond.



WHAT ABOUT THE LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE AT ENCOUNTER?

The phrase we will use to describe the function of government at Encounter is that we are *guarded by the Elders, guided by the Staff* and *gifted through the membership*. However, in more specific terms, the Encounter government will be built around the Lead Pastor and four teams of people: Ministry Team Representatives, Stewardship Team, Staff Leadership Team, and Elders.

Ministry Team Representatives (MTR) are individuals chosen by a particular area of ministry to represent that group as a channel of communication to and from the other ministries, staff and elders. MTR's serve one-year terms and are the only group in the church, other than the Elders, that can call for a special business meeting of the church.

The Stewardship Team oversees all the financial and personnel matters. The Lead Pastor is accountable to the Stewardship Team in all these matters, and attends the team's meetings but without voting privileges. Stewardship Team members serve three-year terms and successive members are chosen by the existing Stewardship Team and approved by the Elders.

Elders function primarily as discerners and shepherds. They also serve as the conscience and guardians of the church. Their role is to evaluate the direction of the church in light of three things: mission, resources and doctrinal statement. The Board of Elders consists of men who will serve three-year terms. Successive elders who meet the qualifications of Elders/Overseers outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-11 and Titus 1:5-9 will be nominated by church members and approved by a committee consisting of four elders and four MTRs (*may be less when we first launch*).

The Staff Leadership Team consists of staff members selected by the Lead Pastor. The purpose of the Staff Leadership Team is to determine programming, give vision to the various ministries of the church, and oversee the day-to-day operations.

The Lead Pastor, Eric Powell, will focus on being the key leader, manager, communicator, buzz agent, vision-caster, and fundraiser of Encounter. He will work hand-in-hand with the rest of the leadership team (staff, MTR, Stewardship, and Elders) to make sure the goals and mission of Encounter are achieved and maintained.

HOW DO I GET INVOLVED?

This is a personal invitation to get involved with helping launch Encounter Church – to step out of the comfortable place you are in take an active role in what Jesus is doing to impact Helena through this generation and beyond.

We invite you to imagine a place, or rather a faith community, that is broken for the things that break the heart of God – that cultivates genuine relationships in an atmosphere of authenticity and acceptance – where the bondage of addictions are broken – where marriages are restored broken families are healed – where you can be free from your past because of the God-given dreams of the future. Imagine a place that captures the attention of a city through the hope of Jesus Christ

We're asking you consider what God will do through a new community of faith that is not safe and comfortable, but dangerous, if you will – taking risks by boldly follow Jesus.



These are the "early moments" of a movement within Helena to lead a generation into a growing relationship with Christ. If you haven't already thought about it, we challenge you to seriously and prayerfully consider being part of this team in at least one of four ways – PRAY, SHARE, JOIN, and TELL.

1. PRAY Regularly

We challenge you to pray regularly for the work and impact of Encounter Church - for the launch team that we are developing and for the people of this city. When you become a prayer partner, you will begin receiving our Encounter Prayer Updates by email, keeping you updated on Encounter and letting you know our specific prayer requests.

Your prayers are an indispensable part of planting this new church. We already have friends and family all over the world that are part of our intercessory prayer team. We're asking you to join them by committing to pray for us regularly.

To become part of our prayer team, please contact us or sign up at prayer.encounterhelena.org

2. SHARE Financially

Starting a church is never a small endeavor, but we believe God is calling us to this task. In particular, it will take significant funds to create the types of environments we believe will impact this technological, media-driven generation.

Staff Support

While we have already been blessed with a number of financial partners, both churches and individuals, we need to raise at least an additional \$1000 to \$1400 per month in one, two, or three year commitments of monthly gifts.

Startup Funds

For startup funds, our goal is to raise a minimum of \$90,000 for our public launch and grand opening. That includes stuff like technical and a/v equipment (\$47K), administrative needs (\$30K for signage, printed materials, kid's ministries, curriculum, and a host of other stuff), and outreach and awareness (\$13K). We can raise these funds to launch through our "Thousand Campaign" – Just 1,000 people giving \$100 each and/or 100 churches giving \$1,000 each.

We want to be a burning bush – something out of the ordinary that catches the attention of a city. No matter how large or how small, we dare you to dream with us how your monthly support or one-time gift could impact the lives of many people who are far from God.

*We challenge you to be a part of this effort financially. Your tax deductible gifts can be sent to the Encounter Fund at our Missoula sponsor church: **Convergence Ministries, 3020 South Avenue West, Missoula, MT 59804**. Please make checks payable to "Convergence Ministries" and include the words "AA Strategy-Encounter" in the memo. Also let us know if your donation is a one-time gift or an ongoing monthly commitment.*

3. JOIN the Launch Team

You may not live in Helena and God may be nudging you to move. You may have been disconnected from or hurt by your church years ago and He may be calling you to get involved with a different kind of church. We are a new community of faith that is not safe and comfortable, but a dangerous church – taking risks by boldly following Jesus.

Much needs to be done in the months before our public launch and we are gathering people to join with us in Helena as part of our Church Planting Team – those people who will form, serve in, and launch Encounter Church. Your involvement as part of this team will involve four essential expectations...

SERVE | To serve strategically in Planting Team meetings to publicly launch the Encounter worship gatherings

PARTICIPATE | To participate in an Encounter LifeGroup (small group) or Discussion

INVEST | To invest your life into those far from God, both personally and through Encounter community impact and awareness events

GIVE | To give financially during your commitment with Encounter

4. TELL Everyone

Finally, the last item on the response card is TELL. You can help, by telling everyone you know of these crazy people who are starting a faith community for this generation in Helena – for those 20s and 30s who haven't found church to be relevant and essential to their lives – a church for people who don't like church.

TO BE A BURNING BUSH

So this is our vision for Encounter Church – a creative, authentic, relevant, relational, intentional, and excellent faith community that intentionally seeks to free people to encounter Jesus.

Our worship is edgy and engaging, our culture is relational and outward focused, and our theology is grounded in the Scriptures. We desire to be a burning bush that captures the attention of a city – something out of the ordinary that draws people in, so that they can hear the voice of God.

And as we free people to encounter Jesus so they can take that next step in relationship with Him, we will equip and encourage this generation and beyond to Encounter God, Experience Community and Engage Culture. Will you be a burning bush?