

CC Melbourne

Welcome Home

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. Romans 1:16

Story by Kathy Blecker
Photos by Geraldine Wilkins



Usher Fred Thompson greets worshipers as they enter the sanctuary. The First Impressions ministry is focused on making people feel welcome at the church.



The congregation at CC Melbourne is ready with open Bibles for verse-by-verse teaching of God's Word.

FLORIDA

A figurine of a turtle perched atop a post adorns the desk of Pastor Mark Balmer, CC Melbourne, FL. This artifact serves as a lesson in humility. Mark explained that the turtle is only resting on top of the post because someone put it there. If it falls off, there's no way it can get back up on its own. It is a concept Mark is reminded of daily. The Lord has placed him in ministry, and it

is the Lord who will sustain him; he can do nothing in his own strength.

"I was content in my 25-year career as a hospital pharmacy director," stated Mark. He was satisfied to serve the Lord by teaching a couples' Bible study at CC Merritt Island, FL. Although he enjoyed teaching Bible studies—having done so since age 19—he never felt called to become a pastor.

Mark added, "Even when I felt God stir my heart in 1992 to take the expositional teaching style I had learned at CC Merritt Island to the city of Melbourne about 25 miles south, I still thought my role was just to get things started." Seventeen years later, Mark continues to teach through the Word of God at CC Melbourne.

"Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare;



Pastor Mark Balmer ministers to a father and son after a service. He enjoys spending time individually with attendees.



CC Melbourne, located in central Florida, has several services that minister to over 8,000 people. Though a big church, there are dozens of small group ministries available so people can connect personally. Many newcomers express that they feel the presence and love of God the moment they walk on campus; like they had come home.



Despite being a large church, many have remarked about CC Melbourne's unity. Mark has taught systematically through the Bible for 17 years at the church.

lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes. For you shall expand to the right and to the left ..."

Isaiah 54:2-3a

In 2005, a passage in Isaiah 54 made a dramatic impression on the church's leadership. From those verses, five words, each beginning with the letter "C," became CC Melbourne's biblical core commitments that embody their vision: COMMUNICATE the good news to everyone everywhere;

CONNECT to others in personal vibrant relationships; COMMIT to be a growing follower of Christ; CELEBRATE and live the fulfilling lifestyle; and CONTRIBUTE your time, passion, talents, and possessions.

The leadership also believed that God gave them this vision for the church body in preparation for future growth. In addition to the main campus in Melbourne, FL, the church now holds services at two video campuses: one in Viera to the north, and one in Sebastian to the south. The video campuses

are an extension of CC Melbourne. They have their own worship teams and children's ministries with an overseeing pastor, but the teaching is streamed live from the Melbourne site. Like the main campus, the two video campuses have grown rapidly. The Viera campus—just three years old—is already in the process of building its own facility. CC Melbourne is committed to keeping up with technology in order to expand the kingdom of God. About 900 people throughout the world listen live to CC Melbourne's services online each week.

Mark observed that many of the people in the Melbourne area had never been exposed to simple, verse-by-verse Bible teaching with practical application. Contemporary worship was also a rarity in the area. "The Holy Spirit has worked through these elements to continue to build His church along the 'Space Coast' of Florida," he added.

Another key to the growth of the church has been the incredible unity among the elders and pastors. "If there's unity, people can walk in and sense the joy," noted Mark. Through that, visitors get a sense of peace and well-being. "Many newcomers have expressed that they felt the presence and love of God the moment they walked on the campus; like they had come home."

"Lost people matter to Christ ... People are searching for God, so we just try to go wherever they are to meet their needs, be a personal church, be like Jesus—touch the people, be with them, pray with them, encourage them," said Mark.

A smile, a friendly greeting, and a handshake go a long way in making people feel welcome at a church. Don Whitt, a volunteer greeter, takes his role seriously. He remembers what it was like entering new churches that seemed cold and uninviting. "A warm greeting is one of the most important things besides the sermon," said Don. When people are looking down, avoiding eye contact, Don does his best to make eye contact and elicit a smile from them before they enter the sanctuary. Don's wife, Marjo, pointed out that a greeter is one of the first people a visitor will interact with who is connected with the church. If they are treated warmly, they will relax and feel comfortable. Now before and after every service, the campus is overflowing with people enjoying time together in the "Commons Area" or sharing a meal at the Common Grounds Café. Don



Attendees obtain audio and video copies of Bible teachings at the media ministry. Volunteer Eileen Kruger, left, aided in different ministries for many years before physical concerns began keeping her at home.

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Pastor Mark Balmer

and Marjo, who have been retired for 17 years, also lead the hospital visitation ministry, which includes about 35 volunteers. Many of those volunteers were once patients who received visits through the ministry. They have experienced the ministry firsthand and are now returning the blessing they received to others.

Two information centers provide vital information to regular attendees and visitors. Visitors can find directions to their children's classrooms; discover how to get connected to one of over 100 small groups, Bible studies, and home groups; or sign up to be involved.

The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself. Proverbs 11:25

Art Fabritiis didn't get saved until he was 52 years old. Now he works in the missions

department at CC Melbourne, using every opportunity to reach the lost world around him. On his way to Daytona Beach to reach out to college students on spring break, Art explained that small groups regularly go out into the community to share the Gospel. Every Saturday night, a team goes to the downtown bar area to share the hope of Jesus Christ.

The campus is a popular spot for junior high students—their school is located across the street. Through the after-school program, many teens take advantage of the full-size gym and video games and participate in a Bible study. Many youth began attending as a result.

Young adults in the community are being reached through Fusion, a ramped-up worship service and Bible study on Sunday nights. They also join together in smaller groups at the church and in homes, as well as at a Tuesday evening prayer meeting.



CC Melbourne has two other campus video venues used during services.



Children's ministry volunteer Traci Campbell leads the children in action songs during their time of worship.



Children listen to the teaching at Sunday school.



Young adults worship at CCM's Fusion service on Sunday evening.

Photo by Rick Mosby

They are also actively involved with the InterVarsity Christian group at Florida Institute of Technology. Associate Pastor Beau DiFrenna, who oversees Fusion, stated that the young adult group is meant to be a part of CC Melbourne, not a separate entity.

"We're trying to do as much as we can to equip these young adults to be leaders in this church," emphasized Beau. While the format of Fusion may be different from the main service, Beau and the leadership are careful to maintain its integrity by continually establishing the Word of God as the foundation. Beau said about the church as a whole, "We get everything from the Word. That's our main focus. That's the center of everything we do: counseling, preaching, direction for ministry."



Children are encouraged to pray on their own during Sunday school.

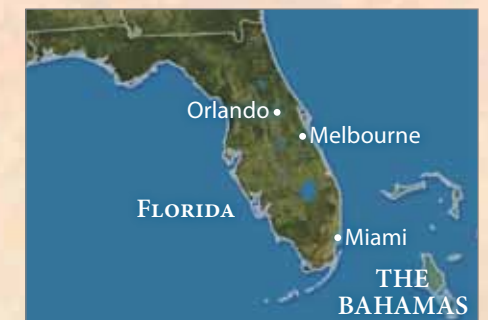
Part of the church's fabric is a passion to get people connected through small groups. Erik Verret and the men's leadership board aim to equip men to be involved in church. "One of our goals is to help men become the spiritual leaders in their homes and equip them to spread the Gospel," Erik explained. To accomplish this, there is a wide variety of Bible studies, classes, and seminars just for men, in addition to a broad sports ministry, father/son events, and discipleship programs.

The same is true within the women's ministry. From their numerous weekly Bible studies and a "Mothers of Preschoolers" ministry, to small groups for single moms or for those struggling with addictions, every woman can find a group to meet her needs. There is also an extensive home group ministry and weekly Family Life Groups that minister to families according to their stage of life. Small groups are well attended. The church also operates a two-year school of ministry.

Additionally, the church recently added a men's luncheon for those who are unemployed. Over 25 men come for Bible study and prayer each week. In addition to the spiritual support, the men receive help with job placement. Local events such as art festivals, fairs, and parades provide opportunities to reach out to the community. They also offer free car washes, taking the opportunity to pray for those in the vehicles. Baptisms are held at local beaches as a public testimony to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Several lifeguards assigned to that area have come to faith in Christ through these testimonies.

Overseas missions are a top priority as the church supports full-time missionaries in Mexico, Ukraine, Haiti, and Peru, while regularly sending short-term teams around the globe. Mark travels to foreign countries several times each year. He encourages the congregation to stretch their faith by going to an unfamiliar place, particularly third-world nations.

Mark concluded, "From CC Melbourne to CC Viera to CC Sebastian, God is working and there's more work to be done. The Lord is honoring His Word and growing His church. All glory and honor goes to Him." ☞



CC Melbourne is in central Florida, 17 miles south of Cape Canaveral.

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