My name is Kevin Haah. I am the lead pastor here at New City.

Welcome to New City!

Last weekend was a blessing. It started with the Good Friday Service. TC put the compleitive liturgy service together with a short homily (which is another way of saying sermon). Then, we all mediated on the Stations of the Cross through the artwork of Kevin Roll. Here is one more to the collection: the empty tomb. [Slide 1] I have to say, they were powerful, moving, and inspiring. Thanks Kevin for sharing your art with us. Also, thank you to Hannah Sims and others for putting the program together. Thanks to everyone who helped out!

The Easter Service was such a blessing! Thank you Josh for always leading us into the joy of our Father’s presence. Thank you to all of the worship team members!! You guys rock! Thank you Hannah who put together the cardboard testimonies and those of you who shared. [Slide 2] It was a powerful communal testimony of what God is doing here. Thank you to all of the Serve Team volunteers who make every Sunday happen.

We had an amazing Easter Fest last Sunday. [Slide 3] Here are the stats: We had about 3550 guest come. Additionally, we had about 165 volunteers. We raised $9,781 for ministries to homeless children such as Worthy of Love. We had no injuries or issue come up. Kids had a fantastic time. I want to acknowledge Kelly Kunf for leading this event. She did a fantastic job! Also, I want to acknowledge the following team leaders:

Bonni Funk
Joe Hernandez
Connie Diaz
Robin Castaneda
Derrick Robinson
David Castro
Shea Nakamura
Kim Johnson
Tamisha Tyler
Johnathan Davis
Conrad Maslen
Ashli Roland
Kevin Kurian
Can you stand up if you are here at this service? Also, if you volunteered for Easter Fest in any manner, can you stand up? Thank you!

Praise God!

As you can see, when the members of the Body of Christ work together, we can really bless the city!

**What I want to do today is to give you a sense of where we are now—sort of give you a state of the church. So, the title of the message today is, “The Best is Yet to Come.”** [Slide 4]

I want to start out with a few passages that helps us put what I will together:

[Slide 5] Mark 1:14-15 say:

14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news (gospel) of God. 15 “The time has come, he said, “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

[Slide 6] Philippians 1:4-6

4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 5 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Let me start by giving you some highlights of who we are:

Here is our racial and ethnic mix. [Slide 7] We are about evenly divided among major ethnic groups.

We have about 54% male and 46% female. In the first service, we have 63% male and 37% female and in the second service, we have more female than male.

About 24% of people in any given service are new to the church. 46% are regular attenders and 24% are members. These are phenomenal numbers.

How they heard: 43% hear through friends, 20% through the Internet, 11% through LA Mission, and about 10% by just walking by on Sundays.

Church in prior year: 56% was churched and 30% were unchurched. 14% blank.

We have about 450 people who consider themselves regular attender or member.
This is who we are but God is not done with us yet.

If you have been here last year, you know that the church faced a few bumps along the way. We had our treasurer relapse into meth, and in so doing, embezzled $18,777 from the church. We are still praying for him. I know there is a warrant for his arrest but I have not heard that he is arrested yet. Let’s keep him in our prayers. We want to see him go back to recovery and seek forgiveness and reconciliation. The good news is that we were able to recover $10,000 from our insurance company. Last year, our total revenue (most of which came from the tithe and offerings) was $488,660, and our total expenses were $485,964, for a net positive income of $2,696. However, because of the embezzlement, we ended up negative $15,882. However, since we recovered $10K, we effectively ended with negative $6K. It is very close to breaking even. And that’s after giving over $45K in mission and church planting support to make sure we participate in things that God is doing outside of our local church. God has continued to provide and bless us. So, with this, we were able to start out new year in a reasonable financial footing.

In addition, we now have a brand new finance team. Greg Johnson and Christin Choi have been diligently serving as the co-treasurers. Brian Tompkins and Janice Tsao have been serving as auditors, and additional members of the finance team. George Castaneda and Jeff Gabert are also serving in the finance team. This crisis made us stronger. We were able to build a better and most accountable financial system. There are several checks and balances built into the system. I am so thankful for the members of the finance team for stepping up. Thank you!!

Also, we went through a time when I got ill. I had some serious headaches and after an MRI, they diagnosed me with a serious brain issue that was life threatening, and immediately hospitalized me. After four MRIs, they told me they made a mistake. Praise God! I did have something called, subduro hemotoma, which is a breeding in my brain. It’s not as serious as the original diagnosis but nonetheless, serious. But, I am happy to let you know that even that has all been resolved now. Praise God!
As you know, we also had a couple of major staff transitions.

Jonathan McCracken, who served as our associate pastor for several years left to pursue church planting. He is still a part of the church. That was a big hole left by the departure. We used the opportunity to do a nationwide search for a new associate pastor. We had over 60 applicants for the position. The Leadership Team, the board of our church, and I went through a rigorous process of selection, and through many interviews, discussions, and prayer, we decided to call TC Moore into the position. He has significant experience in urban multi-ethnic, multi-socioeconomic ministries, has a Jesus-centered, gospel-centered theology, studied at Gordon-Conwell Seminary in Boston. And he accepted. Now, he has been here for a few months, and I can say, he is awesome! It is hard to imagine a person who can better fit than he can. He has a strong gifting in teaching, leadership, and strategic thinking. He can identify and relate to very broad spectrum of people. Urban multi-ethnic and multi-socioeconomic gospel-centered ministry is in his veins. I have been learning from him and he has been learning from me. He has a tender and humble heart. I see that he loves Jesus above all. I think the transitional period has now past. He is now comfortable. He has been a blessing and he and his family will continue to be a blessing to the church! Praise God for bringing TC and his family to New City!

Also, Shirley Rayburn, who served as our children’s pastor for several years, resigned late last year. This left a huge hole in our ministry. But, Kathy Kuo, stepped up to the plate, with the help of Delonte Gholston, and ministered to our children for the last three months. Now, as of this Sunday, Christine Dilworth, who was our first children’s pastor, is back as our permanent and long term children’s pastor. She left as our children’s pastor because she needed a full-time job and the one that she got was pretty intense at a charter school and going to school at nights and weekends to get the teaching credential. But, now, she works as a teacher in Pasadena, and find herself with significant time to devote to our children’s ministry as our new part-time children’s pastor. I am so excited about Christine coming back. I feel great about where our
children’s ministry is headed, from nursery, toddlers ministry, to NewCityKidz and our youth group.

Late last year, we also added one more part-time staff into the team. Hannah Sims joined us as the director of connection and care. We are an unusual church in that we average over 20 newcomers per Sunday. And those are people we know of from the Attendance Card or from the Newcomers Meet and Greet. So, Hannah has done a great job of better following up and connecting to the newcomers, and also seeking to create a better way to care for our church. I’ll talk about that later, but for now, I want to say that Hannah has been a tremendous addition to the staff team. I can truly say that Hannah has the gift of connection, and a huge heart of compassion for everyone. She is one of the most loving and inclusive persons I know.

Of course, these new staff members are on top of the awesome team that we already have. Kelly Kunf is our part-time administrative assistant; but she does way more than that. She functions as the church’s administrator. Just look at the way she led the Easter Fest teams. She has been terrific.

We also have Josh Paredes, our worship pastor, continuing to lead our worship team. What can I say. He is the Michael Jordan of worship pastors. I am so blessed to have him our worship leader! Don’t see sense it? God works powerfully through him as he leads us to the presence of God. I am so thankful for him and Paola, his wife.

And, Delonte Gholston is our amazing intern. In addition to helping out in so many different areas of need in the church, he has been leading us in engaging the community specifically in terms of creating dialogue between the community and the police to help move towards trust. He is leading the effort to put trust talks together.

And of course, we also have Mindy Lee who is our contracted graphic designer, who makes us look good!

[Slide 8] As you can see, we have a pretty amazing team. My roll is to lead this team, teach, be the vision leader our church, recruit, develop, correct, and empower leaders, and pastor those in need. I am also involved in helping to bring churches together to plant churches in every neighborhood in Los Angeles.
It’s not just our staff team; we have an amazing leadership team. [Slide 9] You are going to meet them one by one because in a couple of weeks, each of them will share their testimonies with you. Our Leadership Team is our board. They are people who have the gift of wisdom and discernment to help navigate the church. They don’t deal with small issue but big guardrail issues. I report to them. They have authority to over me. I know that for many of you, you don’t know how our church is structured. Well, I want you to know that big picture issues, and our budget and big financial decisions are made the Leadership Team. They are: Larrow Kaufman, Janice Tsao, Eugene San Jose, Manny Chavarria, David Forster, and Brian Tompkins. Manny serves as the secretary and the moderator of the Team. If you are here (all of you), can you stand up?

The heart of the ministry of the church is not any of the people I mentioned so far. They are our Grow and Serve Group leaders. These are faithful men and women who shepherd people of our church to grow together and serve the community. I am so thankful for all of them. You met some of them when they introduced the groups to you. [Go over each leader’s name]

[Slide 10] Last year, we also had 20 men and women who walked together for 8 months to be trained in our Leadership Development Group. I want to thank all of you who went through that and Janice Tsao who helped to lead that group. We are going to be doing it again this year. The next Leadership Development Group will start in September. This is our leadership development pipeline.

Of course, the church does not run without our Serve Teams: Ambiance, Community Marketplace, Communion set up, Finance, Food Pantry, Sunday Food, Host Team, Intercessory prayer, Sunday Healing Room, Newcomers, Sunday pre-service Prayer, Office Support, Media Team, Special Events, and all of the kids ministry teams for nursery, toddlers, and elementary school kids, and we are going to have a youth ministry going soon as well. It’s amazing when we all members of the body come together to function as the Body of Christ, and we move together to connect people to God, grow together, serve the city, and extend God’s kingdom. It’s beautiful, and I feel a
strong sense that we have a lot of great people working together for the cause of the Kingdom. It’s beautiful!

There are a few areas that we are working to make even better.

Even though Grow and Serve Groups are the primary way in which we care for one another, we realize that there is need beyond the groups. So, we are in the process of appointing Pastoral Care Leaders to work along side of the pastors to deliver pastoral care on behalf of the church to the church. This is for those who need extra prayer and care from the church, whether they are ill or slipping through the cracks, or facing some life issues. We want to be a church that provides pastoral care. The pastoral staff can’t do this on our own. I have been trying to be there for you, but I am running out of steam, especially when I was the only pastor before TC got on board. There is a lot of need at our church, and I am coming to realize that TC and I can’t do this on our own. That’s why I believe God has led us to form this Pastoral Care Leaders. These are leaders who are mature, qualified, have pastoral care gifts like compassion and care, and have the heart for the same. We are in the process of appointing, and will commission and elevate them into the role as lay pastoral care leaders. This is going to be like calling the Calvary to come. I don’t want to drop the ball on caring for everyone in the church that needs care, but I don’t have to do this on my own. We will be introducing these Pastoral Care Leaders, praying for them, and commissioning them in worship services in about 3-4 weeks.

As you can see, this is an amazing organism called church, the Body of Christ on mission of God.

It has been almost 7 years since we launched this church. I believe God has some amazing things in mind for us for the second 7 year of our church. But, I have been feeling a need to stop and pause, rest, seek the Lord for an extended period of time, and be refreshed for the second 7 year of the church. So, the Leadership Team has granted me a 4-month Sabbatical. In preparation for this, I applied for a grant from Lilly Foundation who gives grants for pastors to go on Sabbaticals. And I got it. They gave me $50K for my Sabbatical. I submitted a proposal, and they approved it. And for
several months, I have been praying and planning for my Sabbatical. I will be leaving for my Sabbatical on May 11, 2015. In about a month.

There will be several elements of my Sabbatical: First is giving Grace a break. So, she is going to go on a solo retreat for about a week. Second, I am going to personal retreat to pray, seek the Lord, and just mediate in the Lord. Third, our family will be going on a journey of a life together. We are going to go to Europe, Israel and Korea. Europe, the source of Western civilization that we live in, Israel, the source of my faith, and Korea, the source of where my ancestors came from. It will be an awesome journey. What a blessing this grant is to be able to do this. What a blessing you are to give me this time off to do this. Fourth, I am going to write a book. I never really thought about writing until I was approached by several book publishers to write a book. So, I have been praying, thinking, and planning this for some time. I want to write a book, initially entitled, The Third Way. It is a book about the gospel, and how it is not Conservative or liberal. The gospel is something different all together. It’s the third way. It is radically inclusive in its love but exclusive in its claim. I realize that conversations within the church happen a lot by books. If I want to affect the way people think, I need to write. I felt like God is calling me to write. This would be a way to tell the stories and the struggles of New City, but in a more compelling way. I am going to need a lot of prayers here. I feel that God will speak to us about the next step in the journey as I retreat together with him, as I struggle to write this book.

Now, what’s going to happen at New City when I am gone?

Well, the Body of Christ is working the way it is supposed to work. People will step up where I left. TC will lead us while I am gone. He is going to preach about every fourth Sunday. We have an amazing staff and leaders and servers everywhere! So, I feel very comfortable about where we are as a church. It will help this church become more mature because it will be forced to go forward without me. In some ways, I feel like I have my hands in too many things, and therefore, impeding people’s development as a fully functioning body part in the Body of Christ. So, I think this will be healthy for the church.
Not only that, we have an amazing group of preachers lined up. We will not only hear from insiders like TC, Delonte, Mary Glen, David Guyer, and Cindy Lee, we will also hear of the church planters we support: Ruben Nuno who planted Praise Chapel LA in Westlake, David Cobia who planted Resonate in Santa Monica, Enrique Melendez who is planting in East LA, Sam Theophylus, who is planting Beautiful Gate in Los Feliz, Jospeh Barkley who is planting Radius in North Hollywood. All of these people are influenced by us and seek to plant a gospel-centered neighborhood church.

Plus, we will hear from special speakers like Alex Choi of Sovereign Grace Church in Downtown, Michael Lee from Young Nak Celebration Church, Mark Labberton, Fuller Seminary President.

So, it’s going to be good. You guys will be spiritually fed well during my absence.

I want to say just a few words about where we are going as a church.

[Slide 11] Here is our Vision Statement. [Read]

We believe that this is the theological vision of our church. The Leadership Team and the staff do not believe that God is calling us to change this vision statement.

It is more about how we accomplish the vision.

-I think we are doing certain things really well and we need to continue in that. I think we are an inclusive gospel-centered community. The gospel is at the heart of who we are.

[Slide 12] Mark 1:14-15 say:

14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news (gospel) of God. 15 “The time has come, he said, “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”

The gospel has been at the heart of who we are. We are not about making everyone feel good. We are not about teaching people a biblical principle for a happy life, peaceful life, successful life, or whatever. We are not about just getting people to meet the minimal entrance requirements for heaven. We are not about doing better and doing more. We are about the reality that we need to repent. Why? Because we are more
messed up than we know. And about putting our faith in the good news that Jesus died for us. That God loves us more than we can ever imagine. It is about declaring the gospel of the Kingdom to repent and believe the good news. Not only to become a Christian, but to work out the implications of the gospel in our lives.

Let me give you some implications of the gospel:

The first implication of the gospel is that we become lovers of Jesus Christ. To love God for what he has done for us. It is to enter into a relationship with him in love, in response to his love for us.

Another major implication is that the gospel calls us to be radically inclusive of everyone, even those you think are lesser than you for whatever reason. When you don’t stand on your own work, but on grace, you have no right to judge anyone. That’s what we are about and that’s what our unity is built on. We are all broken, but God loves us all more than we can imagine. The unity that comes from this mutual understanding of the gospel really brings us to actually and really love one another.

Another implication of the gospel is that God is calling us into community, to love one another, and love the world radically and inclusively. Jesus said to love one another just as he loved us and gave himself up for us. We can’t do love without becoming active in community. This is critical to our Christian discipleship. This is the gospel of the Kingdom of God which means that this is a gospel of a community, not just individuals.

Other implications are that we connect people to God (evangelism), grow together (living by the Spirit), serve the city (love), and extend God’s kingdom.

We are called to be faithful in the mission that he has given us to build an inclusive gospel-centered community of lovers of Jesus Christ who connect, grow, serve, and extend.

Now, I believe that as we do so, we must engage in spiritual warfare and pray. And as we do so, God will move. I believe God is going to lead us into something more amazing than what we can now imagine in the next 7 years. I see God bringing numerous number of people into repentance and faith through this church, that means
through each of us. I see God radically reclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in the church, not only here but making an impact in the entire country and the world. I see God radically changing the church to become less judgmental and more inclusive without losing its high view of Scriptures. I see God using us to be a part of a movement to bring the gospel to the Millennials who are deeply suspicious of the church. I see God using us to love this neighborhood and become good news to this neighborhood. I see God awakening you to your purpose to serve the city with the gifts that you have been given. I see us being a part of the movement of planting more than 50 churches in and around Los Angeles that are doing what we trying to do in Downtown. I see us starting new campuses in other neighborhoods in order to bring the good news to that neighborhood and serve that neighborhood. God’s not done with us yet. He’s got a lot more coming. I am so thankful that I get to go for a ride with him. Would you like to be a part of this as well?