

The E91 Story: A CENTURY OF SERVICE, A LIMITLESS FUTURE

OUR HISTORY

E91 has a Christ-centered mission, a rich history, and an exciting future.

For nearly 100 years, E91 has been helping people take next steps with Jesus. In 1924, a new congregation was born known as East 49th Street Christian Church. This new church had a vision to reach the Indianapolis area with the good news of Jesus Christ. As the congregation grew, in 1977 East 49th Street became East 91st Street Christian Church building a new campus to reach and serve the expanding north side of Indianapolis. Through the years, God has poured out his blessings on and through this body of believers.

E91 has a proven track record of church planting and missions, and our church remains committed to local and global outreach through serving our community, sharing our faith, and supporting missionaries around the world. To cite two examples:

(1) One of our missionary partners, Christian Missionary Fellowship (established in 1949), confirms that over the course of its history, E91 has been CMF's all-time largest contributor, helping to support missionaries all over the world.

(2) Since 1984, E91 has directly influenced the establishment of 74 daughter churches across the United States, with thousands of people actively engaged in these churches.

OUR LOCATION

After E91's relocation to the northside of Indy, our church leaders became increasingly aware of the need to serve the Castleton area. Therefore, even though people in our church family come from suburbs, many other areas of both Marion and Hamilton counties, and beyond, we remain committed to serving Castleton, Lawrence, and the north side of Indianapolis.



When E91 moved to our current location in 1977, the Castleton area had a suburban feel. Now, 44 years later, Castleton has changed dramatically. Within a one-mile radius of our campus 67% of the population is single, 16% is Hispanic, 11% is African American and 4% is Asian. Within a five-mile radius of our campus, nearly 70% of the population (112,000 people) are not actively engaged in any church. We see these demographics as great opportunities for us to become even more of a "bridge church," where we grow in racial diversity and impact both Marion and Hamilton Counties for Christ.

Over the last three decades, E91 has continued to reach and serve our local community. In the 1990s we built a gymnasium to serve as our Community Life Center—an intentional "Welcome Sign" telling our community that we are here to love and serve them. We provided community events, such as Bethlehem Village and Trunk or Treat to build stronger ties to our neighbors. In recent years we have upgraded our facilities to enhance our ministry with the Next Generation, expanded our E91 Early Learning weekday preschool, and positioned our unique E91 Counseling Center to serve our community. The Lord has enabled us to accomplish these goals while remaining true to E91's core values that are at the heart of everything we do: Building Authentic Relationships, Reaching the Next Generation, Being Kingdom Minded, and Applying Biblical Truth.

OUR CHANGING MINISTRY ENVIRONMENT

Our campus is strategically located to reach into the city as well as the suburbs—exactly at the midpoint between Broad Ripple in Indianapolis and Hamilton Town Center in North Fishers. This location positions us to reach across racial and socio-economic lines and be a church reflecting the heavenly vision from Revelation 7:9 of those gathering around the throne of the Lamb from every nation, tribe, people, and language. We aspire to be a healthy, vibrant, diverse, Kingdom-impacting church in this new season of growth—a destination place and a launching pad to transform lives, families, and communities through Jesus Christ.

Over the years, the community surrounding our church campus has changed from a predominantly white, middle-class demographic to a diverse population in age, marital status and ethnicity. E91 is located two blocks south of the Hamilton County/Marion County line, which, again, gives us a unique opportunity to be a "bridge church" to reach into our city while also welcoming people from the suburbs.

American culture has also changed dramatically over the years. Today, the largest growing religious affiliation is that of the "nones," those who specify no religious preference. Seventy percent of unchurched people in America today indicate that they have no interest in attending church, and 96% of all church growth in America today comes from transfer growth rather than from new conversions. "Gen Z" (those born between 1997-2012) is considered to be the first generation that is truly "post-Christian."

With fewer people attending church than ever before, we can no longer rely on an "if-you-build-it-they-will-come mentality." But nor can we succumb to despair and conclude that non-Christians are simply not interested in what the Church has to offer. The challenges confronting our church today provide incredible opportunities if we are willing to face them with creativity and bold faith.

First, we will practice the essential ministry of relational discipleship—caring well for others and sharing the gospel with our neighbors in authentic, humble, and personal ways. Second, we will utilize our campus for greater Kingdom impact as we are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Third, we will equip and send out people from E91 to be disciple makers, missionaries, and church planters in their own neighborhoods as well as around the world.

OUR VISION

God is calling us to be both a destination place and a launching pad to transform lives, families, and communities through Jesus Christ.

In the Gospels, Jesus highlighted two key points: “Come” and “Go.” “Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). “Come and see” (John 1:46). “Go therefore and make disciples” (Matthew 28:19). “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). Likewise, we will say: Come to a destination place—E91. From here, you will be launched to go and transform lives, families, and communities through Jesus Christ.

Our campus is an ideal place for people to come and live in community, shop and dine as neighbors, hike and enjoy nature, play and celebrate as families and friends, work and serve as artisans, musicians, and employees, while deepening their faith in Jesus.

We are a destination place. We will explore new and creative ways to reach our community. The possibilities are many—apartments, some small shops and cafes, trails connecting with Sahm Park and the Nickel Plate Trail, shared workspace, and a small outdoor amphitheater for local concerts and family gatherings—all are open for discussion.

We are a launching pad. We will provide practical guidance, mentoring, coaching, and equipping to prepare people for better:

- Life skills in parenting, marriage, and family life;
- Mental, emotional, and spiritual health;
- Vocational training;
- Opportunities for musicians and artists to use and hone their skills.

We will also provide venues for:

- Employment opportunities and shared workspaces for community use;
- Discipleship and leadership development to launch people into a lifetime of Christian service and ministry in the neighborhoods where they live and wherever the Lord may send them.

This vision is the next step in our church’s time-honored story of church planting, missions, and outreach. It is a new day, a new demographic, and a changing culture. We are convinced that “what got us here will not get us there.” We must build on the past, while adjusting and adapting to address the present and prepare for the future. While our commitment to furthering God’s Kingdom will not change, our methods and approach must and will.

With 70% of our unchurched friends, family, and neighbors uninterested in attending church services (Barna Research indicates this number has increased to 80% post-COVID), we must do more. With 96% of all church growth in America today coming from transfers from church to church, we must do more. With our culture shifting to an increasingly negative and even hostile view of the church, God calls us to do more. We will never compromise or abandon the truth of God’s Word, but we must find new ways to present it to the world around us.

And more we shall do. We will be the hands and feet of Jesus. We will provide a thriving place for children and parents. We will be the church and not just “go to church.” We will value and equip lay people so all members of our church can serve the Lord to their fullest capacity. We will engage the neighborhoods where we live as “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Jesus calls us to follow Him in the norms and networks of our daily lives and to show and share His truth and love. Our community needs Christ. Our neighbors need Christ. It’s time for us to build on our past and invest in the future God is placing within our grasp. We must act, and we must act now.

OUR PLAN

To fulfill this God-given vision, we must, as a matter of first priority, eliminate our church’s long-term debt—a goal we expect to reach through LIFT 2.0 just in time for our church’s 100th anniversary! Paying off the mortgage on E91’s property will free up approximately \$300,000 every year to invest in ministry and missions. Proverbs 22:7 says, “The borrower is the slave of the lender,” and Romans 13:8 tells us, “Owe no one anything, except to love each other.” We want to free up Kingdom resources for Kingdom purposes.

We will conclude our current LIFT campaign by the end of 2021. Through this three-year, \$3 million initiative, we have seen God move in the faithfulness of our E91 church family. We are projecting that we will achieve the \$3 million goal which includes the following milestones:

- \$150,000 given to launch a brand-new vocational training program in Thailand through Rapha House;
- \$150,000 given to help launch a church plant in Manhattan, New York;
- \$200,000 raised to relocate our E91 Counseling Center and renovate the restrooms by the Hall;
- \$100,000 raised for additional campus improvements and lobby updates;
- \$2.4 million raised for debt reduction.

We will then take the year 2022 to prepare for two key ministry developments:

First, LIFT 2.0 will be a two-year, \$2 million generosity campaign (2023-24):

- \$1.5 million to retire the remainder of our church debt BY OUR 100TH ANNIVERSARY at the end of 2024;
- \$200,000 for church planting and missions (10% of our campaign goal);
- \$200,000 for much-needed improvements to our aging sound system in the Worship Center and throughout our building;
- \$100,000 for our E91 Campus Development.

Second, we are developing a campus master plan to meet community needs and help E91 become both a destination place and a launching pad. By our 100th anniversary, we will have a debt-free campus that will house the E91 Early Learning weekday preschool, our E91 Counseling Center, and an E91 Community Life Center providing community gathering spaces as outlined above. And, of course, our Sunday worship services and other core church and ministry activities will continue to serve God and draw our membership into His magnificent presence.

Jesus said, “Come and see” (John 1:46) and “Go . . . and make” (Matthew 28:19). We want people throughout the Castleton area and beyond to come and see who Jesus is, what it means to follow Him and to be in healthy, Christ-centered relationships and community. And we want to go and make disciples who also then go and make more disciples.

This plan will enable E91 to grow, plant new churches both through traditional and innovative means, serve our community, and help people take next steps with Jesus for years to come. The Lord Jesus is our focus. Becoming a destination point and a launching pad is our future.

Now is the time for us to be debt free and expand our campus for God’s glory and for the furthering of His Kingdom. By God’s grace, E91 has a century of service behind us and an exciting future ahead.

Those who came before us here at E91 could not possibly have foreseen both the challenges and the opportunities we face as a church in a world that is increasingly difficult to reach people for Christ. They answered God’s call. Now it’s our turn. May God guide our path, and may we serve Him well.