



Core Values

Before setting forth the Statement of Core Values of our Church, it is essential that we have a common understanding of (1) what core values are, (2) why they are important and (3) what they are not.

1. What Are Core Values? - Definition

As used in this Statement, core values are the primary beliefs held collectively by our Church which respond to the question, *Why we do what we do?* They are the beliefs which motivate people to act. Here is where we stand. Here is where we draw the line. In the context of our Church, core values may be defined as *the constant, passionate, biblical core beliefs that drive our ministry.*

2. Importance of Core Values

The basic structure in building for the future of our Church consists of six foundational elements: - (1) mission (i. e., what God calls our Church to do), (2) how we "do church" (the essential principles of Congregationalism), (3) core values, (4) vision (i. e., the visual image of what our ministry will look like in the future), (5) strategic planning, and (6) organization around the purposes of the Church. The core values held by members of the Congregation are closely intertwined with the other foundational elements of the church. They impact the formulation of our mission, how we "do church," our vision for the church and even our strategy and our organizational structure to accomplish our mission and vision.

It is essential that a church's core values are reflected in and/or are consistent with these other foundational elements. To the extent there are serious inconsistencies between the core values which drive our members and the other foundational elements, the potential for serious problems and ineffective ministry is quite real. However, when core values, mission, "doing church," vision, strategy and organizational structure are aligned, the likelihood of a dynamic and effective church greatly increase. Since our collective core values as a church will impact all that we do in the future as a church, thereby impacting each of us as members of the Church, we need a common understanding as to what our core values are.

3. What Core Values Are Not: Not a Creedal Statement

Being a statement of what both motivates and what is collectively important to the members of this Church, naturally the Statement of Core Values sets forth a variety of deeply-held convictions. However, while accepting and adopting this Statement of Core Values, such Statement *is not a statement of faith or a creed binding on individual members of our Congregation*. Rather, our Statement of Core Values provides a guide as to the general thrust of our Church collectively. Individuals are free to accept and/or reject in part or whole various aspects of the Core Value Statement. Subscribing to some or all of the Statement is not a condition of membership. Instead, freedom of conscience is one of the essential elements of our Congregational Way as well as being one of core values.

Core Values of Our Church

Drawn from a survey of the Congregation and adopted by the Congregation, the following statement sets forth our common understanding of the core values of this Church.

1. Trinity

There is one God who exists eternally in three persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each fully God yet each distinct from the other. God the Father created heaven and earth and all things in it. He continues to sustain His creation and is operating throughout history to fulfill His redemptive purpose which is to call all people to fellowship with Him. Jesus the Son was born, lived, died by crucifixion, was raised from the dead and ascended to heaven to join the Father as our arisen Lord and Savior. God the Holy Spirit sustains, guides and empowers us in growing into a life of Christ-like character.

2. Salvation

While originally created to have fellowship with God, humans have defied God and chosen to go their own independent way thereby alienating themselves from God. Jesus satisfied divine justice, thereby enabling reconciliation with God, by voluntarily dying on the cross for forgiveness of our sins.

Salvation (reconciliation with God) cannot be earned through human effort, but rather salvation comes from our response to God's offer of grace through faith (belief and trust) in Christ. Good works reflect an appropriate response to, not a condition of, God's love and grace.

With God's resurrection of Christ, Christ conquered death making good on His promise that all who believe in Him will live. God offers eternal life, as well as salvation, to those who have faith in Christ.

3. Our Relationship with God

Christ is our Lord and Savior through whom God reveals Himself to us.

God created all people, in His image, whom He loves deeply. In His love for us, God gives us free will. We honor God through worship, obedience and service.

God seeks and invites all of us to live in loving fellowship with Him and with each other. God is a personal God with whom we can enter into a caring, loving, and personal relationship.

Faith develops through spiritual disciplines such as worship, prayer, sacraments, service, studying and applying scripture, and fellowship.

4. Worship

Worship is at the heart of a Christian church. Christ's first and greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul and mind. As a prime means of expressing praise, love and gratitude to God, inspiring and uplifting worship is fundamental to our faith.

Preaching

Since our life of worship depends upon the frequent revelation of God's Word, we seek to find, understand and do the Word of God, especially as that Word is revealed in the Bible and through the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Thus, preaching and hearing the Word of God is central to our faith. Whatever its style, preaching is more than simply lecturing or informing (education). Preaching is to make the case for God, declare the Good News, and win the verdict. It is to challenge and inspire us to make God's agenda our agenda.

Sacraments

The sacraments of baptism and communion constitute fundamental elements in our worship of God.

Music

Music, in various forms, serves as an integral element in the worship of God, expression of our faith, fellowship and outreach.

Confession and Forgiveness

An important element of worship is the confession and forgiveness of sin.

5. Prayer

Through prayer we personally communicate and strengthen our personal relationship with God who hears and answers. Prayer serves as a catalyst for spiritual development.

Learning how to pray and frequent opportunities for private and corporate prayer are important elements of church. Conception, planning, and execution of all aspects of our Church's ministry and activities need to be characterized by reliance on prayer.

6. Bible

The Bible is the inspired Word of God. It is fundamental in our understanding of the character of God. It is the authoritative and trustworthy rule of faith and practice for Christians. Scripture rather than church tradition is the final authority. Scripture is relevant to the needs of all people both for all times and for the specific problems of contemporary living.

Preaching and teaching God's Word with integrity and authority enables seekers to find Christ and believers to mature in Him.

Our Church is a Bible centered ministry in all that we do. The Bible is especially important in preaching, Christian education, conduct of the ministries of our Church, and personal conduct.

7. Life as an Integrated Whole

It matters how one lives his or her life. The gospel is not something simply to be read and understood, but to be lived. Faith is the fundamental and practical element of living. It extends to all of life. Every act and task in life, not simply one's act of worship, is the response of a steward of God. For the person of Christian faith, there is no distinction between religious and secular life. All of life is God's.

8. Fellowship in a "Gathered" Church Bound Together by Covenant

God calls us to belong as well as to believe. We are not meant to live alone or in relative isolation from one another. Instead, we belong to Christ's family. We are a community of believers voluntarily "gathered together around Christ" in fellowship with Christ and with one another through our common love of Christ. Such fellowship calls for frequent and meaningful personal relationships with one another creating an environment for richer communion with God, growth of self, and mutual support and service to one another. Loving, trusting, sharing, forgiving and respectful relationships should permeate every aspect of church life making our church a secure and loving home, family and community for all.

By entering into ("owning") a common agreement (the "covenant") between God and ourselves, we personally commit to God and to each other to live a life with Christ according to God's will as that will is revealed through Christ.

Our local church is a congregation of believers who gather together for worship, prayer, instruction, encouragement, mutual accountability for life within our Church community, and fellowship with one another. Through the church, we invest time, energy and resources to fulfill the mission of our Church.

9. Discipleship: Growth in Christ-Like Life

After someone has made a decision for Christ, he or she must be disciplined which is the process of helping people become more like Christ in their thoughts, feelings, and actions. This involves teaching and mentoring people in the foundations of the Christian faith, encouraging them, and praying for them so that they may follow Christ more effectively. This process begins when a person accepts Christ as his or her Lord and Savior and continues throughout the rest of his or her life. Thus, a fundamental role for our Church is discipling believers' growth toward life-transforming Christian maturity and cultivating a Christ-like and loving atmosphere within our Church community.

Discipling calls for Bible based continuing Christian education at all age levels.

10. Service/Ministry

By serving the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of others in the name of Jesus, we respond to God's call to love our neighbor as ourselves. Since caring for people honors God, our Church is here to

minister to (serve) people in Christ's name including participation in missions.

Every follower of Christ has been created unique with valuable gifts which are meant to be discovered, developed and used in furtherance of God's will. Each of us has a mission in the world that no one else can perform. We are committed to encouraging, equipping and assisting each and every member in discovering, developing and using their gifts in ministry to meet the needs of others.

In light of God's love for us, we encourage people to serve Christ through love and gratitude rather than through guilt, shame and condemnation.

11. Reaching Out -Sharing the Good News (Evangelism)

All people, including the unchurched people (i. e., non believers and believers without meaningful affiliation with a church), have value and matter to God. Therefore, they matter to us.

While aware of the advantages of a small intimate congregation, we recognize that growth is the natural consequence resulting from our reaching out to those exploring Christianity as well as from our other ministries. Trusting God to lead us to appropriate growth and size, we set no maximum nor minimum limits on the growth and size of our Church.

God desires for us to reach as many people as possible with the life-changing message of Jesus the Christ. Thus, we are committed to pursuing a wide range of methods and policies (including one-on-one personal evangelism, life style role model evangelism and serving physical, mental and spiritual needs), which do not compromise our integrity or commitment to biblical truth, to reach out and witness the Gospel to the unchurched so as to win them to being followers of Christ. (This is to be followed by discipling them toward Christian maturity.) A fundamental reason for our church to exist is to lead others to accepting Christ as Lord and Savior (i. e., conversion).

We are committed to creating and maintaining a friendly, welcoming and non threatening environment in which those not yet committed feel safe and free to explore the Christian faith.

12. Congregational Way

We are committed to the Congregational Way both in general and to each of the Essential Elements of Congregationalism as adopted by our Congregation.

Our Pilgrim/Puritan forebears sought to be a "City on the Hill" model as to how to "do church." As modern day heirs to this heritage, we are committed to serving as a role model and challenge for other churches as to "doing church" in the Congregational Way to the glory of God.

13. Culturally Relevant: Creativity and Innovation

In today's rapidly changing world, the forms and methods of our worship and ministry must be continually evaluated and, if necessary, altered to fit current needs and new conditions. While proven techniques should not be discarded at a whim; creativity, innovation, and adaptability are to be encouraged to assure that we are culturally relevant in today's world. Effectiveness in ministry, rather than church tradition, is paramount. We seek to communicate the Good News of Christ to contemporary society in ways that can best be understood. However, seeking to be culturally relevant shall only be done in a manner which does not compromise scripture, the basics of our faith, our message and our integrity.

14. Excellence

As a local, church, we are God's franchise in the local community. Excellence honors God as well as attracting and inspiring people. Therefore, in all that we do as a church, we are committed to the standard of excellence by every person exercising their God-given spiritual gifts to the best of his or her ability. If, in presenting ourselves as a reflection of God's love and character, we do so in a mediocre manner, we fail to honor God who offers us love, salvation and eternal life. He deserves the best we can offer.

15. Family Affirming

God calls upon us for the spiritual nurture of the family not only as an expression of our love for others, but also as one of God's means to spread and perpetuate the Christian faith. We are committed to providing an environment which strengthens marriages and families.

16. Tithing

All that we have is a gift from God. Tithing (the giving of 10% of one's income to the church), as well as giving of one's time and talents, is an appropriate response to God's grace which allows us to trust God for meeting our needs.

17. Social, Economic Justice, Moral, Environment and/or Civil Rights Issues

Our Church encourages members, as individuals guided by their Christian values, to be active and responsible citizens in the local, regional, national and/or international community of which we are all a part.